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The Wound That Makes Whole:

Bleeding and Intersubjectivity in Middle English Romance

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation, as well as so much that I do, is dedicated to Laurie Farrow. You wrote me a book once, Laurie. Now I wrote one for you.

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This dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of what seems like a cast of thousands. First and foremost, I am forever grateful to my chair, L.O. Aranye Fradenburg Joy, without whose genius, intellectual passion, and warmth, neither I nor this dissertation would be what we are. Learning, writing, and teaching under her aegis have shaped me as an academic and a person. I am also profoundly thankful to Heather Blurton, whose careful eye has improved probably every page of this dissertation. Her insightful feedback, even when I thought I didn't want it, along with her unwavering support of me as an academic, have inspired me throughout. Special thanks are also due to James Kearney, who, although he often claimed to be the "odd one out" on my committee, has helped this project immeasurably, whether by pulling out exactly the book I needed from his shelves or helping me find the perfect phrasing. I am extremely grateful to all of the teachers I have had, from high school through graduate study, who have helped shape me as a medievalist, an academic, and as a teacher, including Richard Cushman, Stephen Wilson, Tina Harrington, Sharona Barzilay, Bert Gordon, Maura Nolan, Stephen Booth, Janet Adelman, Edward English, Andrew Griffin, Mark Rose, Cynthia Brown, Emily Houlik-Ritchey, and the indomitable Patricia Fumerton. Not fitting into the neat category of teachers, I am also incredibly to Eileen Fradenburg Joy, who has taught me more than almost anyone else about curiosity and kindness. Many thanks are also due to my amazing cohort of colleagues, including Elizabeth Allen, Shay Hopkins, Jonathan Forbes, Shannon Meyer, Megan Palmer, Paul Megna, Kristen McCants, Katie Adkison, Bethany Wong, and Roberta Wolfson. Deserving of being singled out among this list is S.C. Kaplan, without whose friendship and eagle editorial eye I don't think I would have survived graduate school. Sarah Schneider, Amanda Gilliam, and Abby Lebbert, this definitely could never have been written without your undying love and support. I have been lucky in life to have an incredibly supportive family, and to Ellyn Levinson, Christopher Emley, Burton Levinson, Anita Levinson, and many others, I am grateful every day. Finally, thanks to John Karas, who takes me the way I am.

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ABSTRACT

The Wound That Makes Whole: Bleeding and Intersubjectivity in Middle English Romance

by

Rachel Louise Levinson-Emley

This dissertation, "The Wound that Makes Whole: Bleeding and Intersubjectivity in Middle English Romance," analyzes bleeding as a metaphor for expression, physical healing, spiritual purgation, and nourishment in Middle English (ca. 1350 – 1500) romances, in concert with contemporaneous medical texts concerning bloodletting, nursing, and menstruation. I argue that the forms of bleeding detailed in the romances ultimately enable the texts' characters to develop a more robust intersubjectivity, as the vulnerability inherent in bleeding both allows and necessitates the formation of identities based on bodily boundaries and their transgressability. My approach to bleeding as a "metaphor" draws on Lakoff and Johnson's conception of metaphor as fundamentally embodied, and on recent research on physiological responsiveness demonstrating the power words have to change bodies. My project is, at the same time, fundamentally historicist, arguing for the genealogical importance of medieval medicine to current reconsiderations of organic sensitivity to putatively cultural phenomena. Hence my work also affiliates with that of scholars like Louise Bishop, who has shown that the power of language to alter bodily processes was a central notion in medieval materialism. My project approaches the

intersections between medical texts and romances to argue that it is often the words used in medical manuscripts – technical, specialized physical terminology – that have the most power to change bodies in medieval literature. That is, the language of medical care has profound effects on the creation of identity and community in medieval romance.

The theoretical framework of my project is based fundamentally in the growing fields of medical humanities and narrative medicine. I turn to scholars such as Louise Bishop, Elaine Scarry, Rita Charon, Arthur W. Frank, and Jonathan Shay to consider the complexities of the wounded body, and how that body communicates with and relates to others. Other theoretical works I turn to are primarily psychoanalytical and neurological theories of the relation between body and mind (in particular Giovanna Colombetti), as well as neighbor theory (especially Derrida and Žižek). Each of these bodies of critical thought helps me parse the ways in which bleeding, vulnerability, care, sacrifice, and identity and community formation interact in medieval romantic texts. My dissertation distinguishes itself most notably from previous scholarship on blood in the Middle Ages by utilizing the primary interdisciplinary framework of contemporary medieval medical texts, as well as the philosophy of the medical humanities, to analyze the romances.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. Medieval Medicine – No-Longer-Forgotten Modes of Care

In March of 2015, scholars at the University of Nottingham startled the world with the success of a medieval remedy. Using a recipe from Bald's Leechbook, a 9th-century Anglo-Saxon compendium of medical treatments, the team made a concoction of onion, garlic, and cow's stomach, recorded in the manuscript as a treatment for eye infections (Feilden). What made the study the subject of news worldwide was that the concoction was found, when given to infected mice, to kill approximately 90% of MRSA bacteria, the greatly-feared antibiotic-resistant strain of staph infection. While any successful treatment for such a potent and dangerous disease would be newsworthy, what surprised people the most was that the cure was found in a medieval medical textbook. In modern Western culture, we are predisposed to think of all pre-modern medicine as quackery, mostly harmful, occasionally having no effect whatsoever, and virtually never curatively effective.

As the example of the Bald's Leechbook cure shows, however, modern science – and para-science – is turning more and more to more fully understanding, rather than simply rejecting, medieval medical practices. At the 2016 Summer Olympics in Beijing, swimmer Michael Phelps and other athletes showed off circular purple bruises: the unmistakable marks of cupping. A practice dating back millennia, used in both Europe and Asia, cupping is the process of placing cups on the skin, and then using either pressure or heat to create suction inside the cup. As a New York Times piece on Phelps's use of the practice explains, "[C]upping is thought to draw blood to the affected area, reducing soreness and speeding healing of overworked muscles" (Reynolds and Crouse). While the scientific evidence regarding the efficacy of cupping is still scant, other methods, also thought to have

disappeared in the face of modern medicine, are fully supported by medical research. An April, 2017 New York Times article titled, "Leeches? Doctor's Orders," recounts the growing use of leeches in Russian medicine, often in place of expensive blood thinners (Kramer).[1] While the article focuses primarily on the economic reasons for this resurgence of leech use in Russia, it also mentions that "The Food and Drug Administration in the United States cleared the sale of leeches as medical devices in 2004" (6).

Finally, and most relevant to this dissertation, one practice is starting to move out from under the cloud of derision it has faced for several decades, if not longer: bloodletting. In her discussion of pathogenic bacteria and their need for heme, a form of iron found in blood, to survive, Tracey A. Rouault notes that, as recently as 1942, Western medicine prescribed bloodletting as a treatment for diseases like pneumonia. While modern antibiotics are a far superior treatment method, Rouault does not outright condemn bloodletting, and instead acknowledges that "bloodletting in the pre-antibiotic era may have been an effective mechanism for starving bacterial pathogens of iron and slowing bacterial growth" (1578). Rouault's article, I am compelled to note, offers much in the way of explanation as to why bloodletting was such a popular treatment throughout the Middle Ages: after all, if the process were starving some pathogens and thereby curing some infections, evidence of its efficacy would have been quite obvious to practitioners and patients alike. Rouault recognizes the past value in bloodletting while still noting, correctly, that more modern methods are even more effective for destroying pathogenic bacteria; however, for some diseases, including haemochromatosis, bloodletting – more frequently now referred to as

[1] See Chapter One, p. 18, for a discussion of the etymology of the word "leech," and its varied use in Middle English.

phlebotomy – is still, as recently as 2011, "the cornerstone of treatment" (van Bokhoven, van Deursen, and Swinkels, 221).

All of this is not necessarily to say that medieval medical practices should be used more frequently than modern practices, or even that they should be used more today than they already are. As Rouault's article emphasizes, although earlier methods may have had some degree of success, modern treatments, as they are the result of many more years of scientific knowledge and experimentation, often far surpass medieval techniques. Instead, my intention is to re-orient my readers in relation to their perception of medieval medicine, and to illustrate that many of the methods we in the early 21st century may think of as dangerously archaic are more nuanced than that. While many modern readers may reflexively respond to the practices of medieval medicine with disgust and/or horror, I hope to change that, and begin this dissertation by emphasizing the ways in which medieval medicine, just like medicine today, was primarily focused on offering *care* to its patients using the best science available at the time. The following example, taken from Monica Green's translation of *The Trotula*, a 12th-century compendium of women's medicine, demonstrates this care, and how genuinely medieval practitioners, just like today's, sought to alleviate their patients' pain and discomfort over all else:

> For pain of the womb after birth, make a remedy like this. The womb, as though it were a wild beast of the forest, because of the sudden evacuation falls this way and that, as if it were wandering. Whence vehement pain is caused. Therefore, take the tops of elder and grind them and, having extracted the juice, mix with barley flour and with the white of an egg, and then make little wafers with suet for eating. (90-91)

Throughout this dissertation, I support and nuance my arguments about and readings of several medieval romances with material from medieval medical treatises, much like this selection from *The Trotula*. It is my hope that my readers, rather than reacting in horror, disgust, or scorn to the particulars of the treatments mentioned, will be attuned to the intention and motivation of care on the part of these medieval medical theorists and practitioners.

II. Medical Humanities and Narratives of Care in the Middle Ages

As mentioned above, this dissertation makes liberal use of medieval medical texts as support for and complement to my analysis of the romances that are my primary texts. My use of the medical texts as scaffolding for my consideration of the romances may seem unconventional at first glance, but this practice, and indeed the dissertation as a whole, situates itself within the growing fields of the medical humanities and narrative medicine. Particularly supportive of the use of medical texts in the analysis of romances and other medieval poetic texts is the statement by Bruce Clarke and Wendell Aycock in the introduction to their volume, *The Body and The Text: Comparative Essays in Literature and Medicine* that, "as a literal, material practice, medicine may well be 'extraliterary,' but as a cultural practice embedded in a broader history of discourse, it is not extratextual" (2). Indeed, it is my view that medicine is not, to quote Clarke and Aycock, "extraliterary" at all, as I intend this dissertation to demonstrate; nor did premodern writers recognize, let alone respect, the artificial boundaries between the literary and the non-literary that were drawn by modernism and the New Criticism.

I disagree, then, with Victor I. Scherb's contention, in his essay on the Croxton Play of the Sacrament in Clarke and Aycock's volume, that, "[m]edicine makes infrequent

appearances in medieval English literature … in general writers were concerned more with spiritual than with physical health" (161). Logotherapeutics had been prominent in writing on the healing arts at least since Hippocrates (Fradenburg, "Living Chaucer," 58). The rhetorical tradition had also debated the healing powers of language for centuries. The "Hoost" of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrimage makes the connection between literature and health in the link between the Physician's and Pardoner's Tales: addressing the former, who has just told the sad tale of the martyred Virginia, Harry Bailey remarks:

> But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme,
> That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.
> By corpus' bones! But I have triacle . . .
> Or but I here anon a myrie tale,
> Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde. (VI.312-17)[2]

As we shall see, references to the practice of medicine and medical terminology, as well as physical and medical metaphors, abound in medieval English romance literature. Moreover, Scherb's distinction between spiritual and physical health is, for much medieval literature, overdrawn. The mind's embodiment was, in fact, axiomatic in premodern medicine, philosophy, and psychology. For characters such as Malory's unnamed leprous gentlewoman and Gower's Constantine, to name two examples from Chapter One, physical health is inextricably connected to spiritual health; the practices and language used to heal spiritual ailments in medieval romance nearly always have significant implications for physical health, and vice versa.

[2] All citations of the *Canterbury Tales* in this dissertation are taken from the *Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry Benson, 3rd edition, and are cited with fragment and line numbers.

The field of medical humanities, also known sometimes as literature and medicine, is primarily concerned with reading and fully understanding the role(s) and use of medicine in literature. As I have shown above and will show repeatedly in the chapters that follow, medical language and theory was as deeply entrenched in what some might call the "poetic literature" of the medieval period as it was in explicitly medical treatises. Whether in the context of medical metaphors such as Harry Bailey's, above, or in the more concrete examples, plentiful in this dissertation, of depictions of illness and treatment within the narratives of romance texts, medieval literature abounded with the medical. Thus, to put the two genres of writing – that is, more poetic or romantic literature and explicitly medical texts – in dialogue with each other, as the field of medical humanities urges us to do, makes both genres speak to us in a ways that have largely been ignored until now. How, for instance, can we fully understand the significance of Amiloun's miraculous recovery in *Amis and Amiloun*, if we do not read it side by side with medical literature expounding on the curative properties of children's or virgins' blood? Likewise, our understanding of Pandarus' description of himself as Troilus' "leche," and the subsequent metaphorical bleeding of Troilus' "veyne" is incomplete without a thorough comprehension of medieval bloodletting practices. Throughout this dissertation, as I intertwine my analyses of medieval romances with discussions of medical literature, I seek constantly to enhance and complement my reading of each with the other.

The practice and understanding of narrative medicine is as important to the framework of this dissertation as the medical humanities, to which it is closely related. Whereas the medical humanities are a subfield of the humanities interested in the myriad ways in which medicine informs the human experience, narrative medicine, championed by

physician and literary scholar Rita Charon, is a practice of medicine that puts at its forefront the hearing and honoring of patients' stories. In the Introduction to her monograph, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*, Charon writes that the acknowledgement and understanding of narratives qua narratives is as crucial to the practice of medicine as it is to literary studies:

> Without narrative acts, the patient cannot convey to anyone else what he or she is going through. More radically and perhaps equally true, without narrative acts, the patient cannot himself or herself grasp what the events of illness mean. And without telling about or writing about the care of a patient in a complex narrative form, the caregiver might not *see* the patient's illness in its full, textured, emotionally powerful, consequential narrative form. (13, emphasis original)

While Charon's core point, that physicians should let their patients tell the stories of their diseases, and listen carefully, should be an intuitive, automatic part of the practice of medicine, the unfortunate fact is that it is not. Patients' accounts of their illness are often interrupted by practitioners, and patients are forced into filling in boxes on a checklist, rather than listened to in their narrative entirety. So many aspects of modern medicine can be quantified – vital signs, blood test results, etc. – that those numbers often become the central focus of a physician's treatment of a patient, and thus of the patient's experience as well. As Arthur W. Frank writes in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, "The story of illness that trumps all others in the modern period is the medical narrative. The story told by the physician becomes the one against which others are ultimately judged true or false, useful or not" (5). Therefore, if "the story told by the physician" is one composed of quantifiable data and empirically derived facts, any more personal, holistic story the patient tries to tell

will be ignored. If, instead, the physician forms his or her story by being "present as a potentially suffering body to receive the testimony that is the suffering body of the teller," as Frank advises later in his book, then, hopefully, the patient's full story will be honored and, in the process, the physician will be able to give the patient better care.

Charon's central thesis, that attention to and recognition of stories and narratives is essential for the practice of care, is also fundamental to this dissertation. Just as much as this project explores the ways in which medical texts inform and complement my readings of the romances, I am as interested in performing my readings of those romances *as* narratives of illness and/or injury. How, I ask throughout this dissertation, does it change and enhance our understanding of these texts to conceive of them as narratives of illness and care? Equally importantly, if the task of the physician is to listen to and honor their patient's narrative so as to give their patient superior care, what, precisely, is our task, as we read and honor these texts as narratives of illness and injury? How, I ask, can we as careful, thoughtful readers use our understanding of these narratives to provide our own form of care, either to the characters in the texts, to our fellow readers, and/or to ourselves?

III. Embodied Metaphor, Metaphors of the Body

As I hope is clear from my proposal to read romances as narratives of illness, much of this dissertation is logically founded on the idea of metaphor, specifically embodied metaphor. My approach to the embodied nature of metaphor is based, in large part, on the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, as well as on recent research on physiological responsiveness demonstrating the power words have to change bodies. My dissertation is, at the same time, a fundamentally historicist project, which argues for the genealogical importance of medieval medicine to current reconsiderations of organic sensitivity to

putatively cultural phenomena. Hence my work also affiliates with that of scholars like Louise Bishop, who has shown that the power of language to alter bodily processes was a central notion in medieval materialism. My project approaches the intersections between medical texts and romances to argue that it is often the words used in medical manuscripts – technical, specialized physical terminology – that have the most power to change bodies in medieval literature. That is, the language of medical care has profound effects on the creation of identity and community in medieval romance.

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson famously argue that metaphor, far from being simply a poetic device, is in fact a core aspect of the way that humans speak, think, and fundamentally conceive of our world. Using examples like "Happy is Up," "Argument is War," and "Theories are Buildings," Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as a fundamental type of thought: "*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*" (5, emphasis original). The majority of human cognition, they argue, operates based on and through the figure of metaphor. Because metaphor is such a basic and foundational aspect of human cognition, experience, and speech, metaphor becomes a part of the human body as well. Because many metaphors have physical experience as their underlying logic – "Happy is Up," "A Person is a Container" – it is clear that the corporeal has profound influence on metaphor. Likewise, from the ways in which metaphor affects countless aspects of our daily existence, the opposite is true as well, as metaphor affects the physical.

Lakoff and Johnson expand on this latter idea in their later and more in-depth work, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. In this book, they focus, as the title suggests, on the embodied nature of metaphorical thought.

Expanding on the groundwork they lay in *Metaphors We Live By*, they use their reasoning and arguments about metaphorical thought to explain the human cognitive processes behind understanding the concepts of time, events and causes, the self, and morality. Applying the theory of the embodied mind – that is, a mind that is as much a part of the body as the hand or stomach, rather than an intangible, incorporeal consciousness – to most of the most famous thinkers and schools of Western philosophy, Lakoff and Johnson show just how inextricably enmeshed thought processes and bodily experiences are. They point, for example, to studies showing that participants primed with certain metaphors ("Love is a Physical Force") have quicker recognition and recall of sentences (84-85). In their appendix detailing the results of further studies, they conclude, "Our neural capacities for motor control *can* be used to carry out abstract reasoning. The same neural circuitry that can move the body can be used to reason with" (583, emphasis original). The extension, then, of their argument and analysis of metaphor and the embodied mind is that the brain and body are as physically affected by things like metaphor as our ways of thinking – which some might tend to categorize as non-physical – are.

Lakoff and Johnson, of course, are not the only scholars to make this connection between words like metaphors and their effect on the human body. For instance, Giovanna Colombetti, in *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive World*, explores the manifold physiological effects of emotion, which, as we all know, can be profoundly shaped by words. At the heart of Colombetti's work are the interlocking ideas that the mind is always embodied and that emotions are always interpersonal. The syllogistical conclusions to be drawn are that emotions, as part of the mind, are also always embodied, and that it is these embodied emotions that are necessarily interpersonal. In her final chapter, "Feeling Others,"

Colombetti discusses the ways in which the emotional actions we explicitly define as interpersonal, such as empathy and sympathy, are inherently embodied and "felt" in ways beyond simple cognition. Through sympathy and empathy, of course, all of the emotions constitutive of the human experience become shared in an embodied way, as we *feel* our companions' tension, anguish, excitement, etc. Affective intersubjectivity, she writes, is "construed as an embodied or jointly enacted practice" (172). I will return to the extreme importance, to this dissertation, of the embodiedness of intersubjectivity below. If words can change our emotional experiences, and we all have experience of them doing just that, and emotions change our bodies, then words have the power to change our bodies profoundly.

This dissertation, and my scholarship in general, are not alone or inappropriately anachronistic in applying these ideas of the embodiedness of metaphor and the physiological effect of words to studies of medieval literature. Medieval culture was profoundly aware of the impact that words could have on the human body, particularly as it related to medicine, and this has been well documented by a number of scholars. Especially relevant to, and helpful for the purposes of, this dissertation is Louise Bishop's *Words, Stones, and Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England*. Bishop details the dramatic significance of words to the practice of medieval healing through examples like, "A charm written on an apple…to be eaten by a woman in labor or a charm inscribed on parchment to be tied to an ailing limb" (73). What neuroscientists and cognitive studies scholars are only now "discovering," that is, the effect of words on bodily functions and sensations, was a core aspect of the medieval theory and practice of medicine. As Bishop notes, this understanding of the power of words gave the process of reading, particularly medical texts, therapeutic properties: "Reading was…intimately bound with bodily cure. In other words, reading

Middle English medical texts provided a cure not just by the application of their remedies, but by the way reading itself affected the body and spirit" (8). It is difficult to read this and *not* think of Charon's portrayal of the ways in which the stories of illness – both in their telling and in their hearing – are as important an aspect of healing as any pharmaceutical or surgical treatment. Words and the body are profoundly, intricately connected: just as narratives of disease and injury can heal, stories of illness, both literal and metaphorical, can also, if fully honored and acknowledged, help us re-orient how we think of ourselves and our bodies in relation to each other.

IV. Bleeding as Intersubjectivity

Two metaphors, both relying on the fundamental definitions of embodied metaphor explored above, are at the core of this dissertation. The first, addressed earlier in this Introduction, is the notion of reading romances as narratives of illness, and applying the tenets of narrative medicine to our reading of them. The second is the idea that bleeding, as the most potently visible and tangible display of vulnerability, is, in medieval romances, a metaphor for intersubjectivity. The logic behind this metaphor is built primarily on the breaching of boundaries, both physical and figurative. As blood breaches the boundaries of the physical self, and exposes the vulnerability of the body and the person, incorporeal boundaries between individuals are also breached, and people can recognize and acknowledge each other in ways not possible before. As Elaine Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, the sight of the open (wounded) body confronts the human mind with an undeniable reality of "substance" (126). Therefore, blood simultaneously demonstrates that an individual is a discrete subject – the borders of the body

show that the individual is just that, a body individuated from others – and the fact that that subject is permeable – the borders of the individual can be crossed.

As mentioned above, Colombetti's work, particularly her final chapter, focuses on the embodied nature of empathy and affective intersubjectivity. She highlights "empirical evidence of how our bodies respond to the bodily presence of others," drawing our attention to the many ways in which our bodies, often without our even noticing, notice and respond to other's emotions (173). In this discussion, she uses Edith Stein's terminology of "*sensual empathy*," which refers "to the experiential access I have to the other's field of bodily sensations" (174, emphasis original). In other words, when our bodies perceive other bodies, particularly bodies currently under the influence of strong emotion or affect, our bodies *feel*, in a very literal sense, what those other bodies are feeling. Empathy, therefore, is as much an embodied experience as any other. The process by which we, as individuals, come to experience complete intersubjectivity with others necessarily involves a physiological component, and modern neuroscience studying systems like mirror neurons has demonstrated this compellingly (Colombetti, 189). Thus, it should come of little surprise that bleeding, a physical experience, should be the site of such powerful moments of intersubjectivity.

Writing from a less empirically-minded, but certainly no less compelling, perspective, is Frank. As attentive to the centrality of the embodied experience to empathy and affective empathy as Colombetti, he asks:

> What is my relationship, as a body, to other persons who are also bodies? How does our shared corporeality affect who we are, not only to each other, but more specifically *for* each other? Other-relatedness as an action problem is concerned with

> how the shared condition of being bodies becomes a basis of empathic relations among living beings. (35, emphasis original)

Frank's focus on the ill body in particular as a site of intersubjective bonding is incredibly supportive of and complementary to my own argument about the importance of bleeding for the same purpose. Speaking of the ways in which the suffering person can heal specifically through their suffering, he writes that, "Remaking begins when suffering becomes an opening to others" (176). What I find particularly compelling – and especially relevant to the work I do in this dissertation – is Frank's use of the terms "opening" and "wound." Here, he refers metaphorically to an abstract sort of suffering transforming into an opening, which, in this sentence, seems to also have an abstract meaning. In the very title of his work – *The Wounded Storyteller* – as well as in a later sentence I find remarkably poignant and pertinent, he uses the term "wound" – and yet it is obvious, from the content of the majority of his book, that his focus is on chronic disease and illness, rather than literal wounds. "The wound is a source of stories," he says, "as it opens both in and out: *in*, in order to hear the story of the other's suffering, and *out*, in order to tell its own story" (183, emphasis original). The significance of this idea is enough when we understand him to use the term "wound" to refer figuratively to disease; the ways in which suffering opens us, as human beings, to each other are powerful. When we consider the term "wound" more literally, though, as I do throughout this dissertation, the weight of Frank's idea is even greater: when our bodies are literally, physically opened, in a way that is painful, we are simultaneously figuratively opened to each other in ways that, if honored properly, can lead to a true flourishing of intersubjective experiences and bonds.

As Dennis Slattery writes in *The Wounded Body: Remembering the Markings of Flesh*, "The wound is a special place, a magical place, even a numinous site, an opening where the self and the world may meet on new terms, perhaps violently, so that we are marked out and off, a territory assigned to us that is new, and which forever shifts our tracing in the world" (7). Slattery's terminology is problematically idealistic ("magical"), but my analysis rests, to a large extent, on the notion that wounds create a space in which the self and others are, often productively, re-introduced. Scarry asserts that pain "is about the way other persons become visible to us, or cease to be visible to us" (22). Pain, and the literal vulnerability evinced by wounds, is responsible for our recognition – or lack thereof – of others. Bleeding can force us to recognize each other in a way that leads to healing.

None of this is to say that bleeding, or other forms of vulnerability, is always a good thing, even in the romance texts explored in depth in this dissertation. Although a fair amount of this dissertation, as the above pages likely suggest, does emphasize the manifold positive ramifications that bleeding and vulnerability can have in their capacity to effect intersubjectivity, the dangers are also present and acknowledged. Bleeding, of course, can be quite dangerous in excess – both modern and medieval medical writings express an awareness of this. Although many 21st-century readers may think of medieval bloodletting practices as perilously reckless and excessive, countless treatises detailing the precise quantities of blood to be let from a patient, depending on a number of factors, reveal that medieval practitioners were profoundly aware of the dangers of over-bleeding, even if their understanding of blood and circulation was still in early stages compared to today's.[3]

[3] See, for example, Wellcome Library MS 40, a 15th-century medical almanac. The almanac, clearly intended for the use of a phlebotomist, contains two diagrams of the human body, a Vein Man (*Homo venorum*) and

Likewise, vulnerability itself, both literally and figuratively, can be quite dangerous, rather than rewarding. Vulnerability, of course, literally means the capacity to be wounded, to be hurt by another individual. Whether this injury at another's hands is literal, in the form of a sword wound, or more metaphorical, in the form of a verbal assault, the pain it can cause is quite real, even physical, and I do not mean at all to elide that reality. Indeed, in many of the romances I analyze in this dissertation, bleeding and vulnerability do *not* necessarily lead to productive moments of intersubjectivity and happily-ever-after endings. Instead, there is a great degree of variation and shades of nuance, and some moments of vulnerability cause temporary intersubjective bonds followed by death and tragedy, or readers are left feeling that the intersubjectivity achieved is somehow failing, or otherwise unsatisfactory. I hope to do justice to these moments of failure, and of the downsides to bleeding and vulnerability, as much as I do to the moments in which bleeding effects moments and bonds of genuine, productive intersubjectivity.

This dissertation enters the field at an auspicious time: two recent works have focused on blood in medieval literature and culture. First, Peggy McCracken's *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*, published in 2003, explores the key differences, particularly in medieval French romances, between blood shed by women and blood shed by men. Second, Caroline Walker Bynum's *Wonderful Blood*, published in 2007, investigates the cult of blood that developed in the late medieval period in northern Europe, especially Germany. This project intervenes in this current field of scholarship by bridging the two books: like McCracken's work, this project focuses on literature; and like

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Zodiac Man (*Homo signorum*), as well as a number of detailed star and moon charts, all for the purposes of instructing the practitioner in *avoiding* the pitfall of over-bleeding the patient.

Bynum's work, it concentrates primarily on the positive, rather than negative, ramifications of bloodshed.

V. Chapter Outline

This dissertation, as I detailed above, is heavily influenced by Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor. Thus, in many ways, the chapters are delineated based on different metaphors of bleeding, grouped together in productive ways: expression, physical healing, spiritual purgation, performance of chivalry, nourishment, and enclosure. Throughout, as indicated in the first part of this Introduction, my readings of the romances are enhanced and supported by my use of contemporaneous medieval medical writing.

In Chapter One, "Expressing the Wound," I explore in five different romance texts the ways in which bleeding, as a metaphor for expression, is physically healing, both for the person bleeding, and, sometimes, for a person anointed with that shed blood. The metaphor at the heart of this chapter – that bleeding is a form of expression – is based on a number of ideas. One is the literal etymology of the term "expression," and a consideration of the ways in which its meaning, "to press outwards," is both profoundly symbolic in its use in the context of verbal expression, and also extremely physical, as it refers to bodily actions and movements. Bringing to bear the idea of a physician "expressing" a wound, I think about the ways that, much like Frank describes above, wounds as sites of bleeding offer individuals a productive way to express their emotions, allowing them a measure of healing, both physiological and otherwise. I begin with an analysis of Arcite in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," analyzing his claustrophobically *un*bloody death, and the ways in which that death can be read as an extension of his inability to express his love for Emelye in a productive way. I then turn to *Troilus and Criseyde*, and, beginning with the scene in which

Pandarus refers to himself metaphorically as Troilus' "leche," examine the many phlebotomy and bloody metaphors that make up the bulk of the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde. The focus of the chapter shifts a bit after this section, moving to looking at tales in which blood itself acts as a healing force, with expression continuing as the central focus of the chapter. Looking at *Amis and Amiloun*, "The Tale of Constantine and Sylvester" from Book II of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* and finally the episode of the ailing lady and Percival's sister from Malory's *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, I consider these three accounts of blood having the power to cure leprosy. This idea was not unique to these romances, and was relatively commonplace within medieval medical theory – but my reading of these texts considers the blood (and its curative powers) not just as a physical substance, but as a tangible form of expression of certain emotions and thoughts, which in turn are as responsible for the healing that occurs as the blood itself.

In Chapter Two, "Bloodiness in the Crisis of Chivalry," I consider two romances, one canonical and one far more obscure, in the context of blood and its relationship to chivalry. I begin with the seeming paradox of blood and vulnerability in medieval codes of chivalry: chivalry simultaneously encourages knights to make themselves extremely vulnerable, forgoing all physical comfort and safety for the sake of honor, while simultaneously imposing such strict codes of behavior and ritual onto them that any genuine vulnerability, and therefore intersubjectivity, would be extremely difficult to achieve. At the same time, I also examine the ways in which bleeding, just as it enacts physical healing in the texts read in Chapter One, often effects spiritual cleansing or penance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Sowdon of Babylon*. Although bleeding is shown to have this spiritually purgative power in both texts, the strict bounds of chivalry imposed on the heroes of both

texts prevents that purgation from reaching its full effect. In my analysis of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I argue that Gawain's primary problem is that he is too contained, particularly by the strictures of chivalry. As constrained by his armor as he is by both the bedclothes in his room at Hautdesert and his own reputation as the paragon of chivalry, Gawain is only able to achieve one all-too-brief moment of genuine vulnerability and purgation – the nick on the neck that he sustains in his final encounter with the Green Knight. Gawain's decision to return to Camelot wearing the girdle tied about himself reveals that, alas, that moment of vulnerability – and any intersubjectivity that came with it – is gone. My reading of *The Sowdon of Babylon*, a lesser-known 14th- 15th-century Charlemagne romance, focuses primarily on the Saracen convert hero, Ferumbras, and his bloody wounds. Although his copious bleeding, portrayed especially as Christ-like, effects his conversion and seems to offer him some cleansing of his Saracen-ness, the conflicted ways in which Charlemagne and his court treat and react to bleeding and vulnerability mean that he is ultimately excluded from their community. Tying the chapter together (no pun intended) is the object of the girdle or garter, in its centrality to the plots of both romances, as well as to Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster, who, as cousin to King Edward III and one of the foremost knights of the Order of the Garter, is purported to have been the patron for whom *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was composed, and whose *Le Livre de seyntz medicines,* or *The Book of Holy Medicines,* offers an especially relevant exploration of the metaphor of bleeding as spiritually healing.

In Chapter Three, "The Threat of Matriarchal Power," I consider another type of bleeding: breastfeeding. As explained in detail in the chapter, medieval medical science understood breast milk – much like semen – to be a more cooked, or processed, form of

blood, and thus saw breastfeeding and lactation as an exchange of blood between mother and child. This chapter analyzes, in turn, the romance *Sir Gowther*, "The Tale of Canace and Machaire" from Book III of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and William Paris' *Life of St. Christina*, a 14th-century hagiography heavily indebted to the romance genre tradition. Driving my reading of these three texts is the theory that, when bleeding is a metaphor for and means of nourishment, it is supremely intersubjective, and demonstrates just how powerful maternal and matriarchal modes of reproduction are. Medieval men, particularly male writers, heavily invested in patriarchal modes of creation, were threatened by this power (as they still are today), and thus, in each of these texts, we witness the site of nourishment – primarily the breasts, but also food and the act of eating itself – being punished over and over again for daring to be more powerful and effective than the patriarchy. In *Sir Gowther*, the title character's mother, in her desperation for a child, accidentally summons the incubus who fathers her child – a sin for which she, and other givers and sites of nourishment, are punished throughout the romance. Wet nurses sucked to death, nipples bitten off, and strangely impersonal forms of fast all point to the punishment of the matriarchal power of nourishment. Likewise in "The Tale of Canace and Machaire," Gower/Genius' account of the incestuous siblings emphasizes the degree to which Eolus, their father, is more concerned with and angry about maintaining power over his daughter's reproductive capabilities than anything else. When he finds that he cannot control her procreative agency, he has her kill herself, and her final scene, in which her infant rolls around in her blood basking as another infant might revel in his mother's milk, emphasizes once again the violence to which the patriarchy subjects matriarchal power that it cannot control. I end the chapter with Paris' *Life of St. Christina*, showing, as a counterpoint to the

texts that come before, the ways in which female/matriarchal creative power can go unpunished – so long as it remains strictly within patriarchal controls and limits at all times. When St. Christina "nurses" several snakes sent to kill her, or bleeds milk when her prepubescent breasts are torn off, the narrative portrays these as positive moments of female power, to be celebrated rather than condemned. But we the readers are also never allowed to forget that all Christina does – all of her bleeding, her lactating, and her eventual dying – is done only and exactly as Christ wills it. Yes, this Life shows us, the matriarchal model of creation and reproduction is worthy of praise: but only when it is neatly contained within a patriarchal structure.

In my fourth and final chapter, "Closed Narrative, Closed Bloodline," I read carefully one romance text – or, rather, two versions of one story: Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale" and "The Tale of Constance" from Book III of the *Confessio Amantis*. My analysis of the Constance story focuses, as the chapter title suggests, on the ways in which the closure of Constance's narrative, and the corresponding closure of her bloodline, is disastrous. Beginning from the recognition, on the part of many scholars, of the strong suggestion of incest throughout both versions of the story, particularly the end, I consider Constance's narrative, one in which she has no voice and is repeatedly made invulnerable, to be a metaphor for the incestuous family. While it is certainly not a bad thing that Constance is never, despite the best efforts of two evil mothers-in-law and a handful of other foes, actually physically wounded, there is a fair degree of narrative and figurative invulnerability to her that forestalls her making any genuine intersubjective connections throughout the romance, and makes the quasi-incestuous ending of the tale, in which she ends her days in a marriage-like relationship with her father, an almost necessary conclusion and consequence. Perhaps,

the romance seems to suggest, if she were able to choose for herself one moment of genuine vulnerability and intersubjectivity with someone else during her adventures, even if that vulnerability did not involve a literal wounding, she might end her life in a more exogamous, less unsettling way. After all, as both this chapter and dissertation as a whole contend, no productive intersubjectivity can be achieved without some degree of bloody vulnerability.

CHAPTER ONE – EXPRESSING THE WOUND

The focus of this first chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, it discusses texts in which either the process of bloodletting or the substance of blood literally effects a moment of healing. This can take the form of, to list two examples from the chapter, a man who dies explicitly because he is *not* bled, or a man cured of leprosy by being anointed with the blood of children. At the same time, this chapter is also primarily concerned with the ways in which blood and bleeding also act in these texts as a metaphorical act or means of healing. This concept is based upon the metaphor of bleeding as expression. As we will see in the romances discussed in this chapter, when the metaphorical process of bleeding as expression is both voluntary and completed, it successfully effects healing on whoever needs it. (Sometimes this is the person bleeding, and sometimes it is the recipient of that blood.) Whenever either of those conditions of expression – consent and completion – is not met, either no healing happens at all, or healing is permanently and fatally interrupted.

To begin, I would like to explain more fully the metaphor on which the argument of this chapter rests, that is, the metaphor of bleeding as expression. The etymology of the word "express" is fairly straightforward. As "ex" is the Latin prefix signifying motion outwards or away, the word literally means "to press out or away." Common modern usage of the word, however, is mostly figurative and verbally-oriented. When we speak, for example, of a person expressing themselves, we typically mean that they are putting into words – either spoken or written – their thoughts or emotions. Thus, they are taking what is symbolically "inside" them (as we culturally typically refer to thoughts and emotions as being private and inside ourselves) and making it exterior to themselves in a way that is accessible to others. They are "pressing out" their figuratively "inner" thoughts or feelings. While my focus on

the notion of bleeding as a metaphor for expression absolutely relies on this more figurative sense of expression, it is probably more clearly addressed through a less common, but more literal modern sense of the word. When doctors, for example, speak or write of "expressing" a patient's wound, they refer to the process of putting pressure on a patient's body near a wound – typically an infected one – in such a way as to press out of it any pus or dirt that has entered the patient's body, thereby preventing sepsis or any other further infection or complication, and speeding up the process of healing and recovery.

Medieval medical theory and practice saw bloodletting, as well as other means of purgation, as a key means of this latter sense of expression, pressing (or, in some cases, drawing) toxins or imbalanced humors out of the diseased body. The central metaphor on which the thesis of this chapter is based, then, rests on combining these two senses of "expression." As blood leaves the body, either through bloodletting or an accidentally incurred wound, it represents the verbal expression of thoughts and emotions. Just as modern psychotherapeutic theory and practices emphasize the healing power of such verbal expression, this chapter reads bleeding as a metaphorical expression, which in turn effects literal, physical healing. Characters who, for lack of a better word, successfully bleed are also successful in their acts of expression, and therefore they heal. Correspondingly, those who don't aren't. In his introduction to *A Shock to Thought: Expressions after Deleuze and Guattari*, Brian Massumi notably defines expression as "over-spilling" the body, a definition I find especially applicable to the work I do in this chapter (xxi). I contend that bleeding is, in these romances, the perfect example of that over-spilling. Expression, just like bleeding, is fundamentally about the boundaries of the self being breached in a conspicuous way. Indeed, today we often speak of "expressing ourselves" or of "self-expression." What is more "the

self" than blood? How better can the idea of "self-expression" be figured than through the act of bleeding, of the process by which that substance that is so inextricably connected to the notion of our selves breaches the individual boundary?

If we understand bleeding as an act of expression, then blood, correspondingly, comes to represent the means and substance of expression – that is, words, either spoken or written. The connection between words and blood in the Middle Ages was a palpable one, seen, for example, in the proliferation of written spells and cures that were meant to be either worn or consumed in such a way as to be incorporated into the flesh, thereby healing the body. Louise Bishop discusses many of these spells/cures, and also repeats an anecdote that best demonstrates the strong connection between blood and words in the medieval imagination. The story Bishop cites, found in a 15th-century exemplary collection, tells of a clerk who loses his literacy when bled one year, only to regain it when bled again exactly one year later (53). This example emphasizes specifically the deep and profound connection between words and blood. As blood flows out, words are either lost or (re)gained. Just as verbal expression and bloodletting can both be understood as therapeutic practices, both words and the substance of blood carried, in medieval understanding, substantial curative properties. As mentioned above, the consumption of written words, either dissolved into a drink or written onto an apple, for example, could cure diseases and ease ailments. Likewise, the substance of blood was thought to have therapeutic properties. Hildegard of Bingen, for example, wrote of menstrual blood as having the capacity to cure leprosy (McCracken, 5). (Indeed, we will see just this ailment cured by the application of blood several times in the latter half of this chapter.) Thus, if to be bled is to express oneself, and thereby be cured of an ailment, then to be anointed with blood is metaphorically to receive another's healing words.

The caveats to my thesis – that, for bleeding/blood to be successfully curative, the expression must be both voluntary and complete – correspond as well to the metaphor of expression and communication. Just as the words that are forced out of an unwilling conversant are seldom helpful, genuine, or even honest, that blood drawn forcibly from a non-consenting body is not especially curative, as we shall see in the examples in this chapter. Similarly, when a conversation is cut short, or becomes one-sided, the flow of sincere expression typically ceases, and so, as the romances in this chapter demonstrate, any bleeding or exchange of blood that is either interrupted or otherwise incomplete will fail to fully effect the healing that is necessary.

The poetic texts I consider in this chapter begin with Geoffrey Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" and *Troilus and Criseyde*. Next, I turn to *Amis and Amiloun*, "The Tale of Constantine and Sylvester" from John Gower's *Confessio Amantis,* and finally the episode of the leprous lady from Thomas Malory's *The Quest of the Holy Grail.* In my discussion of each, I explore both the successes and failures of bleeding as expression to heal the wounded and ailing characters of the romances.

Medical Texts

Humoral theory, inherited by the Middle Ages from Hippocrates, Aristotle, Galen, and other classical writers, posited that the human body was composed of four humors: blood, phlegm, black bile (or melancholy), and yellow bile (or choler). Each of these humors was associated with a particular temperament – hence our modern descriptions of someone as sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, or choleric – and characterized as either hot or cold, and either wet or dry. Medieval medicinal knowledge craved balance in everything, and understood many diseases to be the result of an imbalance among these four humors. For

example, someone suffering from the depression, lethargy, and lack of appetite characteristic of melancholy suffered from a preponderance of black bile; likewise, an excess of phlegm was often considered the cause of certain types of fevers. While some treatments to restore the balance of the humors focused on ingesting foods and beverages of certain types, the vast majority of balance-focused treatments centered on the purgation of the excess humors from the body. These purgative treatments included emetic, laxative, and diuretic drugs, scarification, and cupping (the placement of very hot cups on the skin in order to pull the excess humor to a specific point);[4] but the most dramatic, well-known, and feared today was bloodletting, or phlebotomy.

The practice of phlebotomy had as its fundamental principle what Joan Cadden refers to as the "ambiguous" nature of the word and concept of blood in the Middle Ages. Blood was, Cadden writes, "an ambiguous word in medieval terminology, referring to a pure, specific, warm, moist humor…and also to the more-or-less balanced mixture of all four humors that flows through the veins" (184). That is, the term "blood" referred both to the specific humor that was hot and wet, and responsible for sanguinity, and also to the fluid flowing throughout the veins, containing all of the body's humors at once, as well as all of the body's fluids.[5] Bloodletting could ease maladies caused by an excess of blood the humor,

[4] It is worth noting that, amongst these other practices often considered "barbaric" in the 21st-century, cupping has seen a startling resurgence in popularity recently. This popularity is mostly seen among celebrities, and can likely be tied to the prevalence of the practice during the 2016 Summer Olympics, the signs of which were often seen on athletes' bare backs. The recent popularity of the practice reveals, among other things, the ways in which the human imagination is still captivated by the idea of healing through bringing "the bad" either to the surface or entirely out of the body.

[5]Although the only definitions relevant to the practice of human medicine, these two were hardly the only contemporary definitions of the word "blood." Among other things, it could refer specifically to blood that has been shed, guilt of bloodshed, blood shed in sacrifice, the characteristic distinguishing members of a specific family, noble lineage, temperament, passion, or a living being. (Oxford English Dictionary)

as well as an excess of any other humor carried in blood the fluid, and it was consequently an extremely popular treatment.

To list the illnesses for which extant medieval medical treatises prescribe bloodletting as treatment would be, to use Susannah B. Mintz's phrase, "unproductively voluminous," as nearly every ailment one can think of is listed as treatable by bloodletting (10). Instead, I find it useful to make brief mention of a select few of the many cautions and detailed instructions about bloodletting that exist in these treatises, as the vast number and intricacies of these instructions both indicate the widespread popularity and use of the practice, and contradict our modern idea of medieval practitioners bleeding their patients with reckless abandon.

Medical texts describing the process of phlebotomy always include detailed instructions for the practice. These instructions can specify the amount of blood to be let, the frequency with which bloodletting should occur, the part of the body from which blood should or should not be let, and many other minutiae. For instance, Hildegard of Bingen, 12th century German mystic and scholar of the natural world, specifies that, "If a person who is physically healthy and strong lets blood from a blood vessel, the amount of blood withdrawn should equal the amount of water a strong and thirsty man can drink in one gulp" (88-89). She also details how often a patient should be bled, prescribing more frequent bloodlettings for older patients, as well as recommending that women should continue to be bled later in life than men. She instructs her readers that, "more humors flow in the cephalic vein than in the median or the hepatic vein because more blood vessels carrying humors are connected to the cephalic than to the median or the hepatic vein. It is therefore healthier to be bled from the cephalic vein more often than from other veins" (90). Hildegard's specificity indicates a

simultaneous enthusiasm for the practice of bloodletting as well as a respect for and fear of its possible dangers. Although popular, the procedure was not taken lightly.

Likewise, the anonymous Middle English translator of the 15th century treatise "Of Phlebotomie" distinguishes between instances requiring the use of "metacentesyn" and "antepasyn." "Metacentesyn," our translator tells us, "ys sayd to be done when the blode ys drawyn on the same partie in / which ys the sekenes, *Verbi gratia*, if pleuresis be in the left / syde, be the minicion made in the left arme" (Voigts and McVaugh, 37). "Antepasyn," accordingly, is the process of drawing blood from the *opposite* side of the body from the ailment. As in the case of the lists of ailments for which bloodletting is prescribed, the instructions, in this particular manual and in others, are painstakingly detailed, and seem interminable. The basic medical theory around such ideas as "metacentesyn" and "antepasyn," which understood some diseases as needing blood to be drawn away from them and some needing that extra blood pulled toward them, evidences once more that doctors had a respect for the complexities and intricacies of bloodletting, and thoroughly understood the dangers of rashly wounding their patients. Similarly, diagrams known as *Homo venorum* (Vein Man), *Homo signorum* (Astrological Sign Man), or Wound Man went into scrupulous detail in informing practitioners about where and when the body should be bled, often accompanied, as in Wellcome Library MS 40, by exhaustively detailed astrological charts. The detail found in these treatises reveals an affect of sober responsibility for one's patients' well-being, and an awareness of the power of the vulnerability created by bloodletting. This process was methodical and careful, not haphazard and reckless. Medieval medical theorists and practitioners appreciated the gravity and importance of bloodletting. This appreciation

can also be seen in the careful ways that the more poetic literature of the time, in particular the romantic narratives, understands and makes reference to the practice.

Phlebotomy and its Metaphors in Chaucer

In one of the most painful scenes of the "Knight's Tale," Arcite lies dying as the result of an injury sustained at the end of the tournament for Emelye's hand, in which he was, all too briefly, victorious. Rather than dying as a result of blood loss, as might be expected, Arcite dies of the opposite: that is, of his inability to bleed, even when the physicians attempt to phlebotomize him. The stymied surgeons find that neither Arcite's "vertu expulsif, or animal, / Fro thilke vertu cleped natural" is able "the venim voyden [to] expelle" (I.2749-51). His body is incapable of ejecting the toxic material of his diseased blood. I argue that the course of Arcite's tragedy can be most helpfully understood as the progression of a disease – specifically, of *amor hereos*, or love-sickness. Arcite's disease progresses from his initial injury, through a long period of festering infection, through the hands of a completely ineffective physician in the person of Theseus, and ultimately to his death. The accumulation of toxicity that eventually kills Arcite, in addition to the incapacity to void it, has its origins in the wound Arcite receives when he first lays eyes on Emelye, described by Chaucer as a violent encounter. Just as his body is unable to eliminate this noxious excess, Arcite is unable to productively fulfill his love to Emelye, and his final injury prevents their marriage. Ultimately, it is the double inexpressibility – both physical and verbal – of Arcite's melancholy that spells his doom, and I see Theseus as the primary cause of that inexpressibility. At every turn, Theseus attempts to cure Arcite of his ill, but his attempts,

rather than allowing for a purgation of Arcite's *amor hereos*, fatally contain the lover's illness, leading to his demise.[6]

As W.W. Allman and D. Thomas Hanks point out, both the "Knight's Tale," and the majority of the *Canterbury Tales* in general, "present lovemaking in terms of cutting, stabbing, bleeding, and dying" (39). In the case of Palamon and Arcite and their shared love of Emelye, love is explicitly portrayed as a crippling physical illness, a trope common to the genre of romance to which the "Knight's Tale" belongs. Indeed, the moment Palamon first spies Emelye's face is explicitly violent, as he flinches away and cries out, "As though he stongen were unto the herte" (I.1079). Looking out the window to see what has "wounded sore" his cousin, Arcite "is hurt as muche as he, or moore" (I.1115-1116). Elizabeth Scala refers to the wounding of each man by the sight of Emelye as "an overpowering bodily change…irremediably affect[ing]" the cousins (50). At least for Arcite, this "bodily change" manifests itself specifically as a wound that begins to fester, eventually leading to a chronic disease.

Later, when Arcite is released from prison and exiled from Athens to Thebes, he wastes away for his love for the now-distant Emelye:

> And in his gere for al the world he ferde
> Nat oonly lyk the loveres maladye
> Of Hereos, but rather lyk manye
> Engendred of humour malencolyk

[6] In her recent article, "Wearing Your Heart on Your Face: Reading Lovesickness and the Suicidal Impulse in Chaucer," Rebecca McNamara astutely compares Arcite's lovesickness to that of the Black Knight in the *Book of the Duchess*, paying particular attention to the suicidal desires of both men. While my own discussion of Arcite's lovesickness is not necessarily interested in this latter idea, her analysis of his lovesickness, and the conversation about it that she and I were able to have at the New Chaucer Society Congress in London, July 2016, is especially relevant to my own (267-274).

Biforen, in his celle fantastyk. (I.1372-1376)

In this passage, the Knight attributes to Arcite not one, but three distinct afflictions: Hereos, mania, and melancholy. While Hereos – alternately called *amor hereos*, lovesickness, or love melancholy – and mania were both considered to be subcategories of melancholy, Hereos was specifically defined as lovesickness characterized by manic obsession with the object of desire, which Arcite's affliction clearly is. Like other types of melancholy, as well as many other ailments of the humors, Hereos was understood to stem, at least in part, from an imbalance of those humors, and an accumulation of toxicity in the blood. I argue, then, that when Arcite is "wounded sore" by his first sight of Emelye, a malignant accretion of black bile and toxins in his blood has begun (I.1115). Medieval medical writers spoke of the necessity of purgation – of two key types, discussed below – as a cure for Hereos; clearly, then, Arcite is already in need of some purging at this point in the Tale – unfortunately, he is denied that purgation.

Notable among medieval writings on Hereos are the treatments suggested; two in particular focus, in different ways, on expression of the emotion. The first, cited by physicians such as Constantine, Avicenna, Gerard of Berry, and Peter of Spain, is intercourse, preferably with the object of desire, although other women can provide the same relief. Gerard of Berry, for example, emphatically writes of lovesickness that "This disease cannot be perfectly cured without intercourse and the permission of law and faith" (Wack, 201). This recommended course of treatment rests not simply on the theory of the satisfaction of the sufferer's desire leading to its abatement, but on the principle that excess material needs to be purged from the body. As an alternative treatment, Bona Fortuna recommends a purgative drink made of "dandelion, larger wild endive, root of larger honeysuckle, and

basil," but the preponderance of recommendations of intercourse suggest that purgation through ejaculation is the most effective means of curing Hereos (Wack, 259). Arcite, of course, is denied this course of treatment. Theseus, in his first attempt to assuage the damage he has done to Arcite and Palamon by imprisoning them, releases Arcite from prison, "Frely to goon wher that hym liste over al," with the provision that he must stay out of Athens (I.1207). The distance this supposed freedom places between Arcite and Emelye, the object of his desire, obviously makes any sort of consummation of Arcite's love impossible. As Part One of the Tale ends with the Knight asking his fellow pilgrims who suffers more in this situation, Arcite or Palamon, the answer seems to be both, as both are physically blocked from the intercourse physicians recommend, Arcite by his exile and Palamon by the prison walls. Indeed, while Arcite's experience of love while in prison was a torturous one, it is only after he is exiled, and his access to Emelye thoroughly blocked off, including even the sight of her, that he begins to show signs of Hereos, mania, and melancholy. Theseus, certainly intending to do Arcite a good turn by releasing him from prison has in fact made his affliction worse.

The second commonly suggested treatment for lovesickness was verbal expression of the *amor hereos*. Medieval practitioners like Johannes Afflacius and Bernard of Gordon write of the therapeutic properties of conversation, specifically with intimate friends. Just as Arcite's exile from Athens completely prevents him from physically expressing his love with and to Emelye, it equally effectively puts a stop to the prison cell conversations between him and Palamon, his closest companion. Although their conversations have, up to the point of Arcite's banishment, been more competitive (who loves Emelye more?) than the

disparagement of the beloved that physicians recommended for these types of conversations,[7] it has been an outlet, for both cousins, for their overwhelming emotions. The separation of Arcite from Palamon, and from their dialogue, then, plays as much a role in his descent into manic Hereos as does his estrangement from Emelye. In yet another way, Theseus' attempt to alleviate the discord between Palamon and Arcite, and each of their afflictions, only compounds the problem.

The way I described these two treatments for lovesickness above – purgation, preferably through intercourse and ejaculation, and intimate conversation with friends – presents them as two different processes. However, it is crucial to my argument that, while these two treatments take distinctive forms in practice, they are the same in medical theory. As I have hinted at previously, the personal conversations prescribed by medieval writers were based on the same principle as the recommendations of intercourse and laxatives: purgation, or, as I am framing it for the duration of this chapter, expression. I return now to Massumi'sdescriptionof expression as "over-spilling" the body. Both intimate dialogue and purgation via intercourse, laxatives, or bloodletting are forms of expression, designed to remove any toxicity – in Arcite's case, obsessive desire for Emelye – from the system. Unfortunately for Arcite, Theseus, who takes it upon himself to try to heal the younger man, repeatedly tries methods that mistakenly force containment upon Arcite, rather than allowing him the expression his psyche and body need.

After Arcite returns, illicitly, to Athens, and his feud with Palamon begins anew, Theseus' next attempt to constrain their aggression into legal forms is the tournament.

[7] Bernard of Gordon infamously suggested in his *Liliun medicinae* that this treatment is best performed as a sort of shock treatment, "in which a disgusting old crone thrusts a bloody menstrual cloth in the lover's face and says: 'This is what your girlfriend is like!'" (Wack, 280, fn 69).

Unfortunately, this method is even less successful than Arcite's exile. As Arcite's unexpressed and unsatisfied love for Emelye has remained trapped in his blood, the evidence of his disease has begun to show itself in more than just the behavior of his manic Hereos. As Frederick Turner notes, by the beginning of the tournament, while Palamon's banner is Venus' white, Arcite's is Mars's blood-red (280). The intense red of his banner serves as a visual representation of the swelling we will see below in his final moments: having not been expressed or purged in any way, he is so full of toxic material – particularly of diseased blood – that that blood has made itself visible to everyone at the tournament. Arcite's over-abundant bloodiness both foreshadows his "clothered" death as well as illustrates the sense in which Arcite's true problem lies in his lack of outlet, for both his blood and his passion. He is all blood, all the time, with no way to release or express it – no opening through which he can connect to Emelye or Palamon in order to ease his ailment.

At the end of the tournament for Emelye's hand, Arcite's victory lap around the arena is cut horrifically short when his horse startles and throws him. Landing on the top of his head and shattering his ribs on the pommel of his saddle, Arcite "lay as he were deed" (lI.2690). Immediately after his fall, the Knight reports that "the blood y-ronnen in his face," but this is, regrettably for Arcite, the last time his blood flows (I.2693). That this ultimately fatal injury is the result not of a wound sustained during the tournament itself, but afterwards, in a moment of chivalric celebration, cannot be ignored. Theseus' repeated attempts to ameliorate the situation with formal, tightly constrained ceremonies like exile and tournaments, not only are unhelpful to Arcite, but quite clearly compound the problem. Borne off the field to Theseus' palace, Arcite receives medical attention, but it all appears to be too little too late:

Swelleth the brest of Arcite, and the sore

Encresseth at his herte more and more.

The clothered blood, for any lechecraft,

Corrupteth and is in his bouk y-laft,

That neither veyne-blood, ne ventusinge,

Ne drinke of herbes may ben his helping.

The vertu expulsif, or animal,

Fro thilke vertu cleped natural

Ne may the venim voyden ne expelle.

The pypes of his longes gonne to swelle,

And every lacerte in his brest adoun

Is shent with venim and corrupcioun. (I.2743-2754)

A strange thing has happened to Arcite here. Despite the best efforts of the physicians at "veyne-blood" and "ventusinge" (bloodletting and cupping, respectively), Arcite's blood refuses to flow. He is like the patient described by medieval medical practitioners as having waited too long for his bloodletting: his blood is so far corrupted that his body, or rather his animal virtue, is incapable of expelling the toxins from his system. The toxins in his body, in combination with the traumatic injury he has sustained, appear to have tricked his body into retaining, rather than purging, the dangerous material. Theseus' repeated attempts to solve the problem of Arcite and Palamon's competitive love for Emelye via restraint and suppression have so contained Arcite that he cannot even bleed to save his life.

Chaucer's word "clothered" in line 2745 embodies the very nature of what is happening to Arcite. Rather than the sort of healthy clotting that signals the beginning of the

healing of a wound, Arcite's blood is clotting before it has "voyde[d]" its "venim," trapping the poison within his body (I.2751). Just like his unexpressed love for Emelye, Arcite's diseased humors cannot escape. H. Marshall Leicester's observation, that the Knight's diction here is "unsentimental" and "ugl[y]," highlights the distant, unsettling nature of the scene (339). L.O. Aranye Fradenburg's parallel, and yet crucially different, descriptions of the tone of this scene as "dispassionate, knowledgeable, medicalizing," and "awkward, flat, medicalized, almost comic (to some readers, at any rate)" draws our attention to the discomfort that the Knight clearly feels telling this part of the tale (*Sacrifice Your Love*, 169, 166). In the moment we most expect the Knight, supposed champion of chivalric values, to embrace Arcite's sacrifice, he backs off, seemingly too horrified by his subject's gruesome fate to engage emotionally with the scene. Confronted with the reality of what tournaments can look like, we, too, are unable to find any elevated glory in it. What should be an opportunity to let the knights vent their hostility in a sanctioned ceremony has only trapped that hostility and disease within Arcite, to the point of his death.

As Arcite's breasts and lungs swell, he is so flooded with toxins and his body so corrupted that it fails to behave the way it needs to. His body refuses to be purged properly, and, from this unpurgable corruption, Arcite dies. Leicester's description of Arcite in this moment as "trapped in his suddenly and ruinously broken body" speaks to the horror of Arcite's injury, and of the highly claustrophobic nature of his death (334). Fradenburg speaks of the way in which "our attention is asked to linger upon his wound, and specifically upon the excess of stuff, of corrupted flesh, that is opened up to our vision through that wound" (*Sacrifice Your Love*, 167). I would like to nuance both of these readings by pointing, once more, to the horrifically *un*openness of Arcite's injury. Though his body is broken in the

sense that it is injured, and no longer functioning properly, it is still stubbornly, and fatally, keeping everything inside it. It is not simply the "excess stuff" that kills Arcite, it is his inability to expel that extra material from his body. He dies of being unable to express himself. Although Arcite proceeds to give a 32-line long deathbed speech, it at times feels stiffly formulaic – "Allas, the deeth! Allas, myn Emelye! / Allas, departing of our compaignye! / Allas, myn hertes queene! Allas, my lyf!" – indicating that no genuine over-spilling, to return to Massumi's definition of expression, is happening (I.2773-2775). Just as his poisoned blood is trapped inside his body, his sincere emotions are confined within his strict style of speech. It is the containment of both into the ritualized behavior and language of chivalry that leads, in large part, to his unhappy end.

Theseus' last attempt to purge Arcite's blood and self of his disease comes at his funeral, where vessels "Al ful of hony, milk, and blood, and wyn" are poured onto the funeral pyre (I.2908). Turner comments on this final association between Arcite and blood simply as a stylistic and structural feature of the tale, "contain[ing] and harmoniz[ing] all the oppositions, hierarchies, and axes in the poem" (286). I argue instead that this ceremony tries to act as a symbolic purification of Arcite through blood, or perhaps, instead, a purification *of* Arcite's blood, through fire. Just like his own unnaturally and fatally blocked blood, the ceremonial blood at Arcite's funeral is contained, right until the very end. Carried to the funeral in a vessel, the blood, at the lighting of the funeral pyre, is cast "Into the fyr that brente as it were wood" (I.2950). Arcite's symbolic blood is allowed to escape the confines of his sick and dying body, and his anguish the constraints of his behavior, only after his death.

This ritual cleansing, despite Theseus' hope, ultimately feels empty and insufficient, especially in light of the trauma Arcite – as well as Palamon and Emelye – have endured. Arcite's sacrifice, which Theseus is quick to formulate as an overall good leading to communal harmony through the marriage of Emelye and Palamon, seems to leave the other two just as closed off and full of toxicity as Arcite was in his lifetime, and both the Knight and Chaucer seem cognizant of this problem. Leicester argues that the Knight's extended, elaborate details of the grove in which the pyre is built point to a discomfort on the part of the narrator. This discomfort arises, he says, because "The funeral of Arcite does not *work* for the Knight" (356, emphasis original). Certainly, in the almost rote recital of the rituals of the funeral, we can read a sense of the Knight's dissatisfaction with the whole affair. While the ceremonial pouring of blood, honey, and wine onto Arcite's funeral pyre seems to achieve some sort of purgation and release for Theseus, the Knight's detached and disappointed tone, here and in the earlier scene, serves to remind us of the failure of that cleansing. Scala's description of the end of the tale as "abrupt" and "awkwardly conventional" draws on this detached tone, as well as the very strong sense that, despite Theseus' loud protestations to the contrary, there is no real therapeutic resolution here (46).

Arcite's death is unmistakably uncomfortable – for him, for the Knight, for Chaucer, and for readers. The description of his body's inability to expel the toxic material that has accumulated within it, as gruesome as it is on the literal, medical level, proves, in his final moments, the very physiological nature of his suffering through lovesickness. It is not simply that because Arcite suffers from Hereos that he really ought to have been purged, and that the subsequent failure of bloodletting is what leads to his death. It is that Theseus repeatedly closes Arcite off more and more, paradoxically and fatally rendering him both in dire need of

purgation and completely incapable of attaining such treatment. Just as the chivalric ideals of sacrifice are shown to ultimately lead to nothing but meaningless cow's blood being burned on a fire, rather than therapeutically purged and cleansed, Chaucer demonstrates that the chivalric paradigm enacted upon Arcite by Theseus is fatally entrapping and blocking. In the emphasis in chivalric behavior, especially as imposed by Theseus, on the inexpressibility of desire, the body cannot properly function. Theseus finally renders Arcite, both physiologically and emotionally, as trapped within his own body as he was trapped in the pile of bodies in Thebes.

Turning to Chaucer's other great contribution to the romance genre, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I would like to focus on the blood and phlebotomy imagery with which that poem is filled. In Fradenburg's terms, "In *Troilus and Criseyde* the figure of the wound is not only prominent but prominently polyvocal" (*Sacrifice Your Love*, 218). I interpret this polyvocality as describing the ways in which Troilus' wound, loudly (and sometimes proudly) expressive, differs from Criseyde's, which often tries its best to stay quiet, sometimes even to heal and close itself. Troilus, first wounded by Love's arrow at the sight of Criseyde's eyes, experiences a Hereos equal to Arcite's for Emelye. Wailing, languishing in his private chambers, gnashing his teeth, and losing sleep, Troilus begins to waste away for his love, and the physical symptoms take their toll immediately. Thus, we are not surprised when C. David Benson, in his list of potential readings of Troilus' experience of love, suggests both "a morally neutral sickness," or, as this analysis will explore in greater detail, "a devastating wound" (132). Criseyde, one can argue (and I will), serves as a metaphorical agent of that wound, and, in turn, Troilus is the agent of Criseyde's wound. As we shall see below, it is when Troilus and Criseyde are able to express their love to each

other regularly that they seem to be well, and come to act as each other's healers as well as wounds. When they are separated from each other, and the lines of communication – and, crucially, expression – between the two of them are cut, they both fall victim to their metaphorical wounds.[8]

When Pandarus, troubled deeply by his friend's as yet unexplained ailment, learns that Troilus suffers from love-sickness, he demands that Troilus tell him the name of his beloved, so that Pandarus can act as his "leech" and cure him of his illness:"whoso list have helyng of his leche, / To hym byhoveth first unwre his wownde" (I.857-858). In order to be cured, Pandarus reminds his friend, Troilus must show his physician his wound. Pandarus' choice of words in describing himself is telling. "Leech," today signifying either the blood-sucking water-dwelling worm, or, metaphorically, a person draining another of some form of gain, also signified, until the late 19th century, a physician. Curiously enough, both uses – blood-sucking, water-dwelling worm, and physician – seem to have arisen around the same time, as the Oxford English Dictionary uses citations circa 900 AD as the earliest example of each, rendering it difficult to determine which meaning came first. As early as the 10th century, clearly, English culture considered physicians to be intrinsically associated with the practice of drawing blood. For Pandarus to use this word to describe himself, then, and to immediately follow it with the word "wownde" stresses the importance of the medical metaphor Pandarus uses to treat Troilus' vulnerability. The more modern meanings, both negative (ie, blood-sucking worm or a person who drains another emotionally and/or

[8] In addition to the argument presented here about Troilus and Criseyde's acts of expression and bloodshed, Corinne Saunders' recent "Affective Reading: Chaucer, Women, and Romance" offers a fascinating analysis of the interplay between cognition and affect in *Troilus and Criseyde*, particularly as it pertains to Criseyde's understanding of her plight (22-26).

financially), point to the dangers inherent in this treatment, to the ways in which Troilus might be made even more ill by Pandarus' "leeching" off of him, draining him excessively.

The metaphor of exposing and talking about one's ailment as phlebotomy – that is, that processing an emotional wound through verbal expression is the same as an act of bloodletting – extends beyond Pandarus' term for himself. He continues to press Troilus for information, to "unwre his wownde," until he finds success:

> "Look up, I seye, and telle me what she is
> Anone, that I may gon about thy need.
> Knowe ich hire aught? For my love, telle me this.
> Thanne wolde I hopen rather for to spede."
> Tho gan the veyne of Troilus to blede,
> For he was hit, and wax al reed for shame.
> "A ha!" quod Pandare; "Here bygynneth game." (I.862-868)

When we read that "tho gan the veyne of Troilus to blede," we understand the metaphor to suggest that his blocked-up passage of emotion has begun to express itself, and some form of purgative process is beginning for him. The remainder of line 867, however, physicalizes the blood metaphor of the past line and a half, as Troilus' face turns red "for shame." Notably, the reference to the redness of Troilus' face – and the word "reed" is used, not "blush," or a synonym – occurs immediately after the metaphor of his vein beginning to bleed. It is as though, being "hit" by both Cupid's arrow and Pandarus' insight, Troilus has begun to bleed metaphorically, but in a way that is made literal by the blood flooding the capillaries in his face. So, too, does the term "wax," as a description of Troilus' blush, carry a medical connotation. The OED cites an 11th century leech book using the word to refer specifically to

the development of a "morbid growth or disease." The literalization of Troilus' figurative wound intensifies the significance of Pandarus' phlebotomy metaphor,as it doubles down on the imagery of blood and illness, gesturing towards the utility of the medical practice, in both its physiological and psychiatric forms. That is to say, the fact that the use of the word "wax" in this context suggests a physical injury or disfigurement underscores how important bloodletting is for Troilus here, both as a literal practice of draining excess blood or toxins, and as a process of verbally expressing his love and grief. Again, though, we must keep in mind that Pandarus' proposed cure via phlebotomy may be too invasive for Troilus – in fact, the former's insistence that Troilus expose his vulnerability to him at times feels intrusive and violent, despite its benevolent intentions.

Pandarus' first assertion – that a man must show his wound to his physician in order to be healed – does not seem to address phlebotomy at all; after all, the physician could simply need to see the wound so that he can properly clean and bandage it. The narrator's continuation of the analogy, however, absolutely makes the phlebotomy metaphor clear. Pandarus needs to see Troilus' "wound" not to clean or bandage it, but to drain it, to bleed it, to make it "express" what is ill inside it. The relationship of the two meanings of that word, "express," as the driving force of this chapter, is illustrated perfectly in this instance: for Troilus to *express* himself (use his words to tell Pandarus how he feels internally) is metaphorically for Pandarus to *express* Troilus' wound (to force out the blood or pus inside it). To return yet again to Massumi's phrasing, Pandarus wants Troilus to "over-spill" his body with the contents of his love-wound, letting what has been contained – his love for Criseyde – come out. In order to make Troilus feel better, Pandarus must extract from his wound the imbalance and disturbance that are making him ill. Of course, in Troilus' case, the

humoral imbalance, or, to use Hildegard's word, *livor,* that is making him ill is unexpressed emotion. Although he has been in love with Criseyde for a number of days now, he has told no-one, least of all Criseyde herself. Like an excess of black bile, his feelings of love for Criseyde have filled him to the point of agony and severe illness, and they must be let out in order to restore balance and his health. Certainly, the image of love's wound complicates matters a bit: unlike the typical phlebotomist, who must make an incision in his patient's flesh, Pandarus already has his opening made for him by Cupid – he just needs Troilus to expose it. Perhaps, then, it is best to consider the unexpressed emotions causing Troilus' illness not simply as a spontaneous excess of one particular humor, but as the noxious result of a festering wound resulting from the strike from Cupid's arrow. Rather than resulting from an internal clotting of toxins, like Arcite's, Troilus' malady appears to be caused by his very vulnerability, his capacity to be wounded. That very vulnerability, I contend, is also what allows him to fall so deeply and so quickly in love with Criseyde.

Over the course of the poem, Troilus feels "his herte blede" five times, the first immediately after he has fallen in love with Criseyde. In the first instance, still reeling from his sudden infatuation with Criseyde barely more than 200 lines previous, the thought suddenly strikes Troilus "that she som wight hadde loved so, / That nevere of hym she wolde han taken hede" (I.500-501). The thought drives him nearly crazy with dread and woe, and makes him feel as if his heart is bleeding. The next time Troilus experiences this sensation comes midway through Book II, as he waits in agony for Pandarus, returned from his dinner with Criseyde, to tell him what he has learned from his niece regarding her feelings for Troilus. Again, here, Troilus' feeling that his heart bleeds is explicitly connected with the emotions of "wo" (II.951) and anxiety. In the poem's third instance of Troilus' bleeding

heart, towards the end of Book III, as Troilus holds Criseyde in the aftermath of their lovemaking, they are both suddenly struck by the unwelcome dawn. Troilus is profoundly moved by Criseyde's aubade: "This Troilus, that with tho words felte, / As thought hym tho, for piëtous distresse / The blody teris from his herte melte" (III.1443-1445). The more vivid imagery here, of Troilus' heart not simply bleeding but weeping bloody tears, grotesquely physicalizes his grief, a move that startles the reader from his or her complacent reading of the post-coital scene, just as the dawn has disarmed the lovers.

Not quite 100 lines later, Troilus bids goodbye to his beloved, "with swich voys as though his herte bledde" (III.1524), again demonstrating the physical pain he feels when separating from Criseyde, and once again emphatically underscoring the connection between bleeding and speech. For Troilus in this moment, the act of expressing his farewell to Criseyde is as physically painful as the act of being bled – and from the heart, no less. The fact that, in this moment, that act of expression is experienced as painful, rather than therapeutic, points to the fact that what has been a source of relief for the two lovers – that is, their communication with each other – is on the verge of ending, and leaving them both incurably unwell. Finally, in the poem's concluding Book, Troilus returns to the gates of Troy the second day after Criseyde has promised to return to him from the Greek camp, only to find, once again, that she is not there: "His hope al clene out of his herte fledde; / He nath wheron now lenger for to honge; / But for the peyne hym thoughte his herte bledde" (V.1198-1200). As the realization that their separation is to be permanent dawns on him, his internal wound opens once more.

With Troilus' bleeding heart in mind, let us return now to Pandarus' analogy that Troilus revealing to him the identity of his beloved is equivalent to a patient revealing his

wound to his leech. The identity of Troilus' beloved is Criseyde of course, and, extending Pandarus' metaphor, this means that Criseyde herself, and the site at which Cupid has opened Troilus to her, can be said to be Troilus' wound. If we consider Criseyde to be the embodiment or personification of the wound to Troilus' heart, each of these instances of his heart "bleeding" makes perfect sense. In the first two instances, he is moved to woe by anxiety – specifically, the anxiety of not knowing whether or not his affections for Criseyde are returned. To expand the metaphor of the wound to the heart, in these moments, the patient is left in a state of ignorance as to what will happen to his wound; things are left, we might say in a tortured pun, open-ended. When a wound is left open-ended it does, as a matter of medical fact, bleed. (Until it clots, of course, but we have seen how damaging that "clothered"ness was for Arcite.) In the case of the last three instances of Troilus' heart bleeding, he is once more moved by anxiety: these times, anxiety regarding his (imminent or current) separation from Criseyde. In these passages, we can expand our understanding of the wounded heart metaphor by considering Troilus' farewell to Criseyde in Book III.

In the voice, as cited above, that sounds as though his heart bleeds, Troilus calls her *his* "dere herte swete" (III.1525). Although "sweet heart" is attested by the OED as a term of affection for a beloved as early as 1290, I champion an alternative reading of the phrase and argue that, at this moment, Troilus and Criseyde have made an exchange: each of their hearts, wounded by Cupid's arrow and their love for each other, has been healed and traded for the other – that is, Criseyde has become Troilus' heart, and vice versa. They have each wounded the other, but have subsequently entered the other's body in a moment of literally em-bodied exchange and healing. The most obvious evidence for this claim, of course, lies in Criseyde's dream of the eagle, who "out hire herte rente, and that anon, / And dide his herte unto hire

brest to gon" (II.928-929). The painless manner of Criseyde's experience of the exchange of hearts performed by the eagle, an obvious stand-in for Troilus, seems to contradict my assertion regarding the woundedness of both Troilus and Criseyde as they take part in this exchange of hearts. However, the violent nature of the eagle's tearing of Criseyde's heart out of her chest is frightening enough for the reader that our awareness of the trauma of the event is heightened, and Criseyde's bloody openness is emphasized. It follows, then, that to be separated from the woman who comes to take his own heart's place would result in the wound in Troilus' heart beginning to bleed once more. Although Pandarus tries his best to act as Troilus' leech, from his naming of himself as such, to his deeply unsettling procuring of his niece for his friend's benefit, an intersubjective reading of the relationship reveals that Criseyde only can be Troilus' true healer.[9] She has wounded his heart, he has wounded hers; he and his heart have taken on the task of tending to hers, and she must be the one to tend to his.

Indeed, Criseyde seems drawn to Troilus by his very woundedness. Benson notes in his reading of Criseyde's first observation of Troilus, in Book II, as he returns from the battlefield injured, that "The text hints that the sight of Troilus' wounded but physically powerful body might have been one of the forces that impelled Criseyde to accept his love" (138). Criseyde, even before she dreams of the eagle, is moved by the vulnerability of Troilus' body. The illness and despair Troilus suffers in Criseyde's absence is pointed to by George Edmondson's description of the hero as "exist[ing] in something of a continuous deathlike state" – that is, when Criseyde, his heart, is not present, Troilus' wound reduces

[9] I am aware that I have been convoluted, and perhaps even contradictory in the above analysis. I have identified Criseyde as Troilus' wound, heart, and physician, in turn. However, I see her as taking on each of these roles throughout the course of the poem, and consider her fulfillment of each to be complementary to and dependent on (rather than contradictory to) the others.

him to a condition of torpor, one caused by the loss of his vital spirit through his unclosed wound (145). Alternatively, Troilus is always dead – except when Criseyde is around to stop up his amorous wound and revive him. Criseyde's importance to Troilus' health is noted again by Edmondson: "it is Crisedye who, for most of the poem, enables Troilus not to have to confront the poignant fact that he is alive only provisionally" (158). While Edmondson here refers primarily to his argument that Troilus, like Troy itself, occupies Žižek's "space between two deaths," I find his observation regarding the life that Criseyde is apparently capable of restoring to Troilus a salient one for my argument. Criseyde, it is clear, is crucial for Troilus' survival. In her prolonged absence, as we will see below, he is denied access to his primary partner in expression. As a result, he simultaneously becomes stopped up and has his wound go unstaunched by she who has been his leech, and he dies.

This argument is buttressed by the two passages in which Criseyde, as well, is said to feel her heart bleed, or to feel pain in her heart. At the very moment at which Troilus falls in love with her, he is not the only one struck in the heart. Standing in the crowd in the temple, the young prince casts his eye around the crowd, "And upon cas bifel that thorugh a route / His eye percede, and so depe it wente, / Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente" (I.271-273). In the very same moment, both lovers are struck physically, Troilus by Cupid's arrow, and Criseyde by Troilus' piercing eye. Each wounds the other's heart as they fall in love, and Benson observes that the detail of Chaucer's turn here to Troilus' "inner reactions" points directly to "changes in his body" as a result of his new love, while Fradenburg remarks on "his vulnerability to engraving" (Benson, 130-131, Fradenburg, *Sacrifice Your Love,* 207). I would argue that Criseyde, too, registers the moment and the new love in her body, and is engraved upon by Troilus and his penetrating eye-beams. Just like Troilus, Criseyde's flesh

has been laid open by the moment of infatuation. Later, the poem's narrator uses for Criseyde the exact same language used for Troilus in the examples cited above at the very beginning of Book V, as Diomede leads Criseyde out of Troy: "Ful redy was at prime Diomede / Criseyde unto the Grekis oost to lede, / For sorwe of which she felt hire herte blede" (V.15-17). Much like Troilus, Criseyde experiences her anxiety and grief at being separated from her lover as a physical pain, one in which her wounded heart, previously in Troilus' care, begins to bleed in the absence of her physician. Also, like Troilus, Criseyde uses the language of phlebotomy as she seeks treatment from her lover for her wounded heart. At the beginning of their consummation, "Criseyde, whan hire drede stente, / Opned hire herte and tolde hym hire entente" (III.1238-39). Just as Troilus opens his vein to Pandarus, Criseyde opens her heart to Troilus, simultaneously revealing her wound for his healing and making herself ultimately vulnerable to him. The fact that her verbal vulnerability immediately precedes her sexual vulnerability, as she literally opens her body to him, heightens the potency of her spoken openness, and draws a meaningful connection between her sexual availability to him and her heart's availability, both metaphorically and literally.

Earlier, when Criseyde learns that she has been traded for Antenor at her father's request, she is despondent, but promises Pandarus that she will not let Troilus see her distress, lest it make his own even worse:

> "Go," quod Criseyde, "and uncle, trewely,
> I shal don al my myght me to restreyne
> From wepyng in his sighte, and bisily
> Hym for to glade I shal don al my peyne,
> And in myn herte seken every veyne,

If to his sore ther may be fonden salve,

It shal nat lake, certeyn, on my halve." (IV.939-945)

Criseyde's promise to seek through every vein in her own heart for some "salve," or medical treatment, for Troilus' agony at their imminent separation is perhaps the best evidence yet for my contention that the two lovers consider each other to be both the cause and the physician of their wounded hearts. Criseyde is so devoted to Troilus, and to the care of his heart, that she is willing to plumb the depths of her own, to conceal her despair, to care for him. If a cure for his wound can be found by removing her own blood from her heart, she will do it. More than opening herself to him, Criseyde is willing to *empty* herself *for* him.

Criseyde's inclination to drain herself of her own heart blood to heal her beloved bridges the two central ideas of this chapter: that bleeding is healing for the person who bleeds (she does seem to gain some relief through this expression, at least initially, in the form of mutual romance), and that it is also healing for another person, to whom that blood is given. Specifically, it is not simply the fact of blood given to another, but the willingness to participate in the expression of blood, which enables one to heal another.

Bleeding to Heal Others

Criseyde is not the only character to contemplate the beneficial medical effects her blood may have for another person; in fact, several romances deal with the notion of one person's blood being the only effective cure for another person's illness. To be sure, this idea was hardly absent from the medical texts themselves. The primary ailment for which bathing in blood was recommended was, as shown in the following poetic examples, leprosy.[10] As

[10] Of course, the idea of blood being physically healing was also primarily an aspect of religious literature: both Christ's blood and that of various saints were believed to have miraculous therapeutic properties. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Three.

one example, Peggy McCracken points out that, "Hildegard of Bingen identifies menstrual blood as a cure for leprosy" (5). This common cure was clearly well-embedded in the medieval imagination.

One exceptional example of this treatment is in the romance *Amis and Amiloun*. The two friends, whose noble love for each other is expressed with the phrase "of boon and blood" twice in the poem's opening lines,[11] are also startlingly similar in both bone and blood, to the extent that they can take each other's place and have the switch go noticed by no-one, including their wives. The two of them take full advantage of this fact when Amis finds himself in trouble. When asked by Amis to duel the evil steward for him so as to take advantage of the loophole provided by their identical similarity, Amiloun happily accepts the challenge. Fired by his love for his brother-friend, Amiloun agrees, promising Amis that "Y schal sen his (the steward's) hert blode!" (l. 1116). Amiloun's stated desire to not only defeat the steward, but to see his blood spilled on the ground, begins to hint at the romance's belief that the spilling of one person's blood can reverse or amend the wrong suffered by another, the wrong in this case being the steward's threat to Amis' reputation and life.

In addition to trying to right a wrong, in this case, it appears that Amiloun demands of the steward physical expression, or substantiation, of his pain and defeat. The steward's blood will represent for Amiloun, to use Elaine Scarry's words, "the precious ore of confirmation … the mother lode that will eventually be reconnected to the winning issue," giving credence to his defeat that, for instance, merely unhorsing the steward would not provide (137). To be sure, the reader is rooting for the title characters against the steward, but Amiloun's victory here does substantiate a fiction – Amis *is* guilty of that which he is

[11] l. 60, l. 142.

accused. The steward's blood, then, is the outward sign required to make this fiction a fact, and, although he is clearly portrayed as a villain, the pain to which Amiloun subjects him, ultimately unjustly, calls into question the heroes' very heroicness. It is this very moral ambiguity on the part of the romance's identical heroes to which much of the bloodshed at the end of the tale directs its morally and communally healing powers.

While Amiloun takes his friend's place to fight the duel, Amis slips into Amiloun's bed. When placing a sword between himself and his friend's wife does not seem to do the trick of persuading her out of carnal relations with the man she believes to be her husband, Amis speaks up:

> "Dame," he seyd, "sikerly,
> Ich have swiche a malady
> That mengeth al my blod,
> And al min bones be so sare,
> Y nold nought toche thi bodi bare
> For al tis warldes gode!" (ll. 1171-1176)

While Edward E. Foster, in the TEAMS edition of the romance, suitably glosses "mengeth" as "troubles," other contemporary definitions of the word, suggesting a sense of mixing or intermingling, imply that Amis' use of the phrase here hints to Amiloun's wife that he is not who he appears to be: his malady has riled up and bothered, but also mixed, his blood, with that of his friend. The two men no longer have stable distinct identities, as they seem to become each other, both in body and in spirit. Furthermore, Amis' assertion that his (albeit invented) ailment is one affecting his blood suggests that the steward's blood Amiloun has vowed to shed for him is explicitly meant to be exchanged for, and heal, his friend's blood.

These ideas, that the blood of Amis and Amiloun is mingled, and that Amiloun draws blood for his friend's physical health, both come to the fore in the romance's infamous climax.

Failing to heed the divine warning that, should he lie and fight this duel for Amis, he will become "Fouler mesel" than ever has been, Amiloun is struck, as the messenger promises, with leprosy (l. 1259). Finding his own wife not remotely as loving as Amis' Belisaunt, Amiloun is expelled from his own home when she is repulsed by his hideous disease, and ends up being wheeled around in a cart by his devoted nephew, Amoraunt. Fortunately, though, Amiloun and Amoraunt eventually find their way to Amis' home, where they are taken in lovingly. To their horror, both Amis and Amiloun are visited that night by visions of the same message:

> Yif [Amis] wald rise on Cristes morn,
> Swiche time as Jhesu Crist was born,
> And slen his children tuay,
> And alien his brother with the blode,
> Thurch Godes grace, that is so gode,
> His wo schuld wende oway. (ll. 2203-2208)

In a world in which the punishment for, essentially, perjury is leprosy, the demand of children's blood by a divine messenger is simultaneously horrifying and completely fitting. Although shaken by the demand, Amis reasons that, "Mi brother was so kinde and gode, / With grimly wounde he schad his blod / For mi love opon a day," and decides to carry out the instructions of his dream (ll. 2296-2298). In the romance's most horrifying scene, Amis creeps into his children's bedroom with a basin – "For he nold nought spille her blode" – slits their throats, gathers the blood, then tucks them back into bed and retreats (l. 2308). Here, the

exchange of blood for blood is made explicit: because Amiloun has shed blood for him in the duel with the steward, Amis will spill[12] his children's blood – which is, by extension, his own blood. In this case the medicinal effects are more explicit than in the earlier scene: rather than Amiloun shedding the steward's blood – and, in the process, risking his own health – in order to heal Amis' invented illness and his real political trouble, Amis must shed his/his children's blood *to cure Amiloun of his leprosy* – the leprosy that is, we remember, incurred by Amiloun shedding blood on Amis' account. At this point, the reading of "mengeth" in the earlier scene as "intermixed" seems far too appealing to ignore, as the blood of the two friends becomes so commingled as to be indistinguishable.

Miraculously, the romance ends happily for everyone, although I agree with Foster's assessment "that we are more astonished than elevated by the happy resolution" (417). In a move shocking loving mothers everywhere, Belisaunt, upon learning what Amis has done to their children, blithely replies that, while God can send them more children, he is unlikely to find another friend like Amiloun, and he has therefore made the right decision. Her lack of emotional response to the death of her children at her husband's hands emphasizes the fact that, for many of the tale's purposes, they are *his* children (rather than hers), and that it is therefore a portion of *his* blood that he has drained from them. This emphasis, in turn, serves to remind readers that the most important relationship in this romance, rather than the one between spouses, or between parents and children, is that between Amis and Amiloun, and the ways in which the blood of each of them is meant to serve and heal the other before and above anyone else. Amiloun wakes, after his sleep following his anointment with Amis'

[12] As is clear from the above quote, the multi-valence of the word "spill" is explored here. Although Amis will spill – that is, shed, let flow – his children's blood, he is careful not to spill – that is, waste – any drop of it. The two shades of meaning of the word beg the question: isn't every act of bloodshed, at least in some respect, wasteful?

children's blood, to find that "Al his fowlehed was agoo" (l. 2408). Finally, in the most unexpected (and least explained) turn of events, Amis and Belisaunt enter their children's room, only to find the bodies they expected to bury "Without wemme and wound / Hool and sound" (ll. 2419-2420). How their complete bodily intactness has been restored is never even questioned, and the romance ends satisfactorily – at least for the characters, though not for many readers.[13]

To me, it seems that this entire sequence of events must be explained by two primary aspects of the medieval understanding of blood. The first, of course, as mentioned above, was the notion that bathing in blood, particularly that of infants or virgins, was an effective treatment for leprosy. This medieval fact, however, explains only Amiloun's recovery. The other key idea for understanding this sequence of events is the mixing of blood, and the importance of blood relations between father and child, and brother and (adopted) brother. From the poem's introduction of Amis and Amiloun as alike in "boon and blood," it is clear that we are meant to pay extra attention to the similarity of their blood, despite the fact that they have no literal blood relation to each other (l. 60). Over the course of the poem, however, they intentionally mix their bloods together, as Amiloun sheds blood – both his own and the steward's – on Amis' behalf. The collapse of the two friends' identities in this section of the romance in contexts both violent and carnal simultaneously con-fuses their blood with each other's. This mixing, so apparently abhorrent to the God who punishes Amiloun with hideous leprosy, can only be undone, or rather amended, by the converse operation, carried out by Amis. His anointment of Amiloun with the blood of his children

[13] For an especially trenchant exploration of the moral ambiguities surrounding the murders of Amis' children, as well as the loophole Amis and Amiloun exploit to clear Amis of a crime he did, in fact, commit (the seduction of Belisaunt), see Leah Haught, "In Pursuit of 'Trewth': Ambiguity and Meaning in *Amis and Amiloun*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 114.2, 2015, 240-260.

which is, in medieval understanding, a portion of his own blood,[14] finally physicalizes and literalizes the brotherhood between the two men. Amiloun is now officially a blood relation of Amis, and is therefore forgiven for his crimes and cured of his leprosy. Simultaneously, Amis' decision to voluntarily shed his own blood for the sake of bringing his friend into his blood family is rewarded with the resurrection of his children. As McCracken writes, "The anointing with blood may also be seen to enact a symbolic redefinition of lineage: Ami and Amile [the French analogues of Amis and Amiloun] are united in a common lineage by the blood of their children" (50). After some 2500 lines of bloodshed and progressive mixing of bloods, Amis and Amiloun find themselves more connected, in bone and in blood, than ever before, having re-written themselves into each other's lineages. The openings they have made for each other, both in themselves and others, have created a bond between them that is even stronger, it seems, than that between two brothers born to the same parents. The sharing of shed blood, as it is a means for the two men to express both their love for each other and the priority of their relationship with each other over all others, seems to be more important than the sharing of inherited blood.

Of course, the cost to Amis of his children's lives is not actually realized, as they are miraculously resurrected, but the potential cost, the cost he thinks he must pay for his friend's health, is almost exactly analogous to Abraham's expected sacrifice of Isaac. Derrida writes of the moment Abraham lifts the knife over Isaac's head, before the angel interrupts, that "This is the moment when Abraham gives the sign of absolute sacrifice, namely, by putting to death or giving death to his own … this is the impossible to grasp instant of

[14] Medieval understanding of conception, which will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter Three, held that embryos were created by the comingling of the mother's uterine blood with the father's sperm – which was, in turn, considered to be a purified form of blood. Therefore, children were thought to be literally made of the blood of their two parents, and their blood was a continuation of their parents' blood.

absolute imminence in which Abraham can no longer go back on his decision, nor even suspend it" (95). Much like Abraham, Amis lifts his knife over his children at the behest of an angel supposedly speaking on behalf of God, and, like Abraham, Amis is willing to completely submit himself to a love other than the utter and complete devotion he feels to his children. Of course, in Amis' case, the sacrifice is not to show his absolute submission to God, but to reflect his unqualified love for Amiloun. It is perhaps this key difference that, among other things, leads Foster to declare that, in the tale, "sleaze abounds and is respectfully rewarded" (418). While a reading of the story as one of noble, utter love for a blood-brother, as I performed above, is completely reasonable, a reading such as Foster's, as one of "mean people continually rescued from their own immorality" is equally valid (ibid.). While Amis' sacrifice for the sake of his friend evinces his complete devotion to him, and while God chooses to reward this devotion with the resurrection of the children, Belisaunt's shockingly cold moment of reminding Amis that "'God may sende ous childer mo, / Of hem have thou no care'" serves a similar function to the Knight's detached tone when describing Arcite's death: it reminds us of the true horror of what is happening (ll. 2393-94). Likewise, the description of Amis' terrible action – "Her throtes he schar atuo" – recalls to us once more Scarry's crucial point: this sacrifice, and Amiloun's recovery, is only possible because someone is hurt, even if that hurt is miraculously, and mysteriously, reversed (l. 2310). As terrifying as the story of Abraham and Isaac has been to millennia of generations, Amis' violence to his children, as it is actually realized, is even more chilling, despite the happy resolution. The tale of Abraham and Isaac, after all, can be justified as Abraham's utter submission to his God – on the other hand, Amis' murder of his children is done not for a divine or superior being, but for someone whom the romance emphasizes over and over

again is his equal in all ways. Thus, the selfishness of Amis, and his decision to shed what he sees as his own blood, rather than his children's, to express his love for Amiloun, renders the ending of the romance, ostensibly a happy one, deeply unsettling.

Both Criseyde and Amiloun deliberately choose to lose their blood to heal another, but the bleeding of Amis' children is not so voluntary; however, as discussed above, due to the fact that the romance figures the children's blood as an extension of Amis' blood, the consent of this expression is simplified (or at least disregarded by the romance) in this instance. Another literary instance of the blood of unwilling children recommended as a cure for leprosy, but one in which the willingness issue is not elided by matters of paternity – can be found in one of the tales in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. While the *Confessio* itself falls outside the strict bounds of the traditional romance genre, many of the tales told within, those tales meant to caution Amans away from a life of sin, either come directly or borrow heavily from the romance tradition. It seems fitting to draw on the *Confessio* not just for its reliance on the romance tradition, but for its concomitant interest in the healing – intellectual, spiritual, and physical – of Amans by Genius. As James Simpson notes, Genius is described in the Latin lines opening Book I of the *Confessio* "as one who might provide a medicine for the wound of love" that so torments Amans (200).[15] Diane Watt, as well, notes that "Cupid's healing touch suggests that the old man's (Amans') infatuation is a debilitating disease" (68). Watt's medical language hardly feels out of place, given Simpson's assertion that, among Genius' interests in the theoretical sciences is "the complexion of physical bodies," and attesting to him an interest in healing Amans' physical body along with his soul makes sense

[15] "*Confessus Genio si sit medicina salutis / Experiar morbis, quos tulit ipsa Venus. / Lesa quidem ferro medicantur membra saluti, / Raro tamen medicum vulnus amoris habet"* (Book I, at l. 202, translated by Galloway on Peck, 78 as follows: "Having confessed to Genius, I will try to discover whether that is the healing medicine for the diseases that Venus herself has transmitted. Even limbs wounded by the knife may be brought to health by treatment; yet rarely does the wound of love have a physician.")

(212). Genius appears, in my view as well as Simpson's, to draw a firm connection between Amans' physical and spiritual health, evident in the fact that his exempla often connect the two ideas as well.

One such story connecting physical and spiritual health is the "Tale of Constantine and Sylvester," found in Book II, the book dedicated to guiding Amans away from the sin of Envy. "Among the bokes of Latin," the Confessor tells Amans, he finds the tale of the noted Emperor, who "the lepre cawhte in his visage," progressing to the point of being unable to leave his chamber (ll. 3187, 3192). Constantine sends for a team of scholars, presumably of medicine, who, after a period of deliberation, conclude that "Thei wolde him bathe in childes blod / Withinne sevene winter age," and that such treatment "scholde assuage / The lepre and al the violence" from Constantine's body (ll. 3206-3207, 3208-3209).[16] Trusting in his doctors' advice and confident that his body is worth more than those of countless children, Constantine sends messengers throughout the Empire, "The yonge children for to seche, / Whos blod, thei seiden, schal be leche / For th' emperours maladie" (ll. 3219-3221).

Already, the medical language has extended beyond the simple ideas of malady and cure to metaphorically term the blood of the children Constantine's "leche." As discussed above in reference to Pandarus, the term was broadly used to refer to a physician of any kind. At this level of the metaphor, then, the children's blood is anthropomorphized, and given the human qualities of a physician. Rather than simply acting as a cure, the blood promises to have a degree of agency in Constantine's recovery. One cannot rely simply on the broad definition of leech as physician, however, while ignoring the obvious suggestions of the

[16] For an excellent analysis of the tale that adeptly applies Rita Charon's idea of "narrative medicine" to Constantine's experience, see Pamela Yee, "'So schalt thou double hele finde': Narrative Medicine in the "Tale of Constantine and Sylvester," *South Atlantic Review* 79.3-4 (2015): 89-104.

blood-sucking nature of that other kind of leech. That is, while a "leche" may be a physician in general, that specific term will always evoke the process of bloodletting. Therefore, the personification of the blood of the children as Constantine's "leche" reaches a new level of seeming paradox: how can someone's blood act as the remover of someone else's blood? The children's blood will act as the Emperor's leech by, in the bath his physicians prescribe, purging him of whatever diseased blood has caused his leprosy, and replacing it with their own pure blood. This unusual personification of blood posits another way to understand the thesis of this chapter: bleeding/blood heals. Here, blood takes on as active a role as the act of bleeding has elsewhere, as blood is made leech. The agency afforded to the blood in this case, however, is lacking in one chief characteristic, present in the act of bleeding performed by, for example, Criseyde and Amiloun: willingness and choice to be shed, to express itself. This independent agency reveals both the dramatic significance of this blood, as well as the detached, depraved, and, ultimately, ineffective way in which the physicians view and try to use it. One cannot, despite what Constantine's doctors are trying to do here, separate the blood from the acknowledgment of the personhood of its source and have it maintain its efficacy. Blood can be an expressive agent on its own, but only when the agency of its source to choose that expression is preserved.

The reader is never actually given the opportunity to witness whether the unwilling children's blood will have these healing powers. As the children and their mothers are gathered to his courtyard awaiting their slaughter, Constantine is awoken from his sleep by the chilling sound of the mothers and infants weeping, and he is prompted to meditation on the emptiness of human hierarchy. After concluding that being Emperor makes him no different in body from any of his subjects, Constantine recollects what he has apparently

heard of the Christian God, and, deciding that he would rather remain ill than be healed by "the blod which gulteth noght," he has the mothers and children sent home, making sure to dispense a great deal of charity amongst them all (l. 3294). As Simpson writes, "out of a responsive imagination of the pain he (Constantine) is about to inflict, he places the interests of others above himself" (265). More than simply placing the interests of the children and their mothers above himself, Constantine is moved by his empathy, by his experience of the anguish of his subjects. This instance of intersubjectivity, of Constantine deciding to sacrifice his own immediate physical health in the interests of his subjects, accords with Simpson's figuration of Gower's political metaphor regarding the king and the body politic: "[the king's] own health is inextricably bound up with that of his subjects" (284). Constantine recognizes, in this moment, that, just as his success as an emperor is tightly interwoven with the support of his populace, so too is his more literal physical health indelibly tied to the success and support of their bodies; he cannot destroy his subjects' bodies to heal his own. Nor, indeed, can he force their bodies to express to him a blood or desire to heal them that they do not have or desire to express. As a ruler, he must prioritize the bodies of his subjects above his own. To consider the physical bodies left intact by Constantine's choice to sacrifice his own health nuances Simpson's metaphor regarding political health. The health of Constantine's subjects is an extremely literal one in this case, rather than a more abstract "political health." This act of literalization serves to emphasize the importance of *intactness* to political health: Constantine cannot successfully control his empire if he has violated the integrity of his body of subjects – or his subjects' bodies. Gower reminds Amans and his reader that a good and successful king is reliant on his honoring of his subjects' political and bodily intactness.

Constantine's decision to spare the children is rewarded that night, when he is visited by Saints Peter and Paul, who promise him that, if he will send funds to the monk Sylvester and endow the burgeoning Church, he will be saved through God's mercy. With Sylvester as a guiding force in his life, they promise him "Thee nedeth of non other leche" (l. 3364). Sylvester, then, the tale's icon of Christianity, has come to take the place of the blood of the children as Constantine's leech. The promise made to Constantine by Peter and Paul is that his penance and embrasure of Christianity will free his body from needing the physical, grotesque cure of the children's blood, and his new spiritual life will become the only cure he needs. Trusting in the saints even more than he previously trusted his physicians, Constantine follows through in his endowments to Sylvester and the Church, so much so that the monk agrees to baptize him. Gower's text is eager to point out to the readers that it is from "the vessel which for blod / was mad" that Sylvester baptizes Constantine (ll. 3445-3446). My point – and, indeed, the poem's point – in re-centering the focus of the reader on Constantine's abandoned plan of mass infant slaughter is to emphasize the contrast between the blood of innocents collected in an evil, pagan ritual, which, we can assume, would *not* have cured Constantine of his leprosy, with the good, pure water of Christian baptism, which, true to the promise of Saints Peter and Paul, does provide him with relief:

> And evere among the holi tales
> Lich as their weren fishes skales
> Ther fallen from him now and eft,
> Til that ther was nothing beleft
> Of al his grete maladie. (ll. 3455-3459)

The story has changed: it is now no longer the blood of innocents that cures leprosy, but instead the very fact that no such blood was shed (as evidenced by the empty vessel), that is able to affect that cure. An empty vessel, Lacan writes, "introduces the possibility of filling it" (120). The void of the vessel prompts the most significant decision of the tale: Constantine's choice to leave this vessel empty of children's blood introduces the possibility of filling it with salvific baptismal water, thereby filling himself, symbolically, with Christian salvation and healing.

The water of baptism, of course, while vastly different in Constantine's story from the blood of the gathered children, has long had explicit connections to blood. A list of the medieval works in which the blood of Christ is said to have baptismal powers would quite possibly be longer than the *Confessio Amantis* itself – the trope was an extremely common one.[17] Constantine's ultimate remedy, then, is the result not of the planned involuntary bleeding of his kingdom's children, but of his own voluntary sacrifice of his health for his subjects, made explicitly parallel to Christ's sacrifice of himself for humanity. Consequently, we can understand Constantine as being cured by blood – but it is the transfigured blood of Christ into baptismal water, not that of the children. In his decision to enter into the mutual, consensual exchange of expression with Christ and the Church, rather than attempt to force expression out of the children of the realm, Constantine effects his own healing.

The fact that Constantine ultimately spares the children he has had gathered for the sake of providing his restorative bath is, of course, part of what leads to his healing under the waters of baptism, and it is a relief for the reader. The abject horror experienced by the

[17] One example, from Julian of Norwich:

> And than came to my minde that God hath made waters plentiuous in erthe to our service and to our bodily ease for tender love that He hath to us, but yet lekyth Him better that we take full homely hys blissid blode to wassch us of synne, for there is no licur that is made that He lekyth so wele to give us. (XII, ll. 481-484)

children and their mothers when gathered is enough to render Constantine one of the few characters (as opposed to the narrators and authors) discussed in this chapter to demonstrate a more complex understanding of bloodshed and expression. Constantine could easily fall into the system Derrida explains in which society "*puts to* death or … *allows*to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children" (86, emphasis original). The emperor could, like so many other rulers, choose to benefit from the loss of the children of his realm. But in a rare moment of clarity, as quoted in the analysis above, he recognizes the fundamental unfairness of so many children and their mothers being forced to bleed for just one emperor, just one man.

The final poetic text I turn to sees once more a person shedding her blood to cure another person's malady, but as opposed to the bleeding of Amis' children or Constantine's subjects, it is voluntary, and consequently effective (although its efficacy has been called into question by some scholars). In Malory's *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, Percival, Galahad, Bors, and Percival's sister are traveling together, in search of the Holy Grail – we must note, another empty vessel associated with collecting self-sacrificial blood. Along the way, they encounter the castle of a lady with a strange affliction and tradition: Percival's sister, a maiden, is not permitted to leave the castle, she is told, before she has undergone "the custum of thys castell" (590). This custom, the knight accosting the sister explains, is that, "'What mayde passith hereby, sholde hylde thys dyshe full of bloode of hir rgyht arme'" (590). The band of travelers, dismayed that Percival's sister must participate, reluctantly enter the gentlewoman's castle, and learn that the lady's experience has been not all that dissimilar to Constantine's, although her exact illness goes unspecified:[18] having come down with a

[18] Other versions, particularly the French *La queste de saint grall*, specify that the ailment is leprosy.

"malodye," the gentlewoman can find no "leche" able to cure her, until an old man suggests that, "she myght have a dysshfulle of bloode of a maydyn, and a clene virgyne in wylle and in worke, and a kynges doughter, that bloode sholde be her helth for to anoynte her withal" (591). Once again, the blood – specifically of a virgin – is purported to have medically therapeutic properties.

In her discussion of the significance of virgins' blood, McCracken notes that, "the difference [between the blood of virgins and that of non-virgins] is not in the blood itself, but in the state of the body that sheds the blood – the intact virgin's body incarnates a unique purity and the virtue of the body guarantees the virtue of the blood" (2). There seems to be a crucial importance in this moment – not unlike the importance of a man marrying a virgin – of the unnamed gentlewoman being the first to penetrate the intact body of the virgin by accessing her blood, the first to engage with her in an act of expression. Martin Shichtman observes the way in which Percival's sister's bloodletting represents a sort of marriage between her and the ailing gentlewoman. "The blood spilled by Percival's sister," he writes, "also seems to represent a symbolic sexual consummation" (18). This figurative union between the two women, Shichtman argues, which simultaneously allows Percival's sister to consummate and remain virginal, grants her a sort of apotheosis in the tale. After all, the Christian tradition tells of one woman who was simultaneously intact and significantly receptive: the Virgin Mary. Unlike Mary, however, Percival's sister is not entirely passive. While she is penetrated by and receptive to the lady's knife, her blood then becomes an active agent upon the gentlewoman's body, suggesting a mutually penetrative consummation, or act of mutual expression, between the two women.

Moved by the tale of the gentlewoman's plight, Percival's sister gladly agrees to give her blood, despite Galahad's objection that, should she fill the proffered dish with her blood, she shall surely die. "'Truly,' seyd she, 'and I dye for the helth of her I shall gete me grete worship and soule helthe, and worship to my lynyage; and better ys one harme than twayne," she says, her final comment forbidding any possible violence enacted in her defense by Percival, Galahad, and Bors (591). The following morning, she goes through with the donation; as feared by Galahad, the blood loss is too great, and she dies. Unlike in the tale of Constantine and Sylvester, however, in this instance we have the opportunity to learn how effective blood really is as a cure because we see it in action. Temporarily, at least, it is extremely effective: "So the same day was the lady heled whan she was anointed with hir bloode" (592).

I say temporarily, because, not 31 lines later, Galahad and Percival, on their journey from the gentlewoman's castle, hear behind them a booming voice: "Thys vengeaunce ys for bloode shedynge of maydyns!" (593). As they ride away, the castle is destroyed in a ferocious tempest, and not a single person they find as they depart remains alive. McCracken, in her analysis of the French analogue, likely Malory's source, *La queste del saint grall*, considers this destruction of the gentlewoman, so shortly after her recovery, to support her argument that, "unlike hagiographical narratives, romances do not represent women's bloodshed as having a lasting effect, either symbolic or actual" (9-10). Specifically in regards to this tale, she writes: "Perceval's sister's death thus accomplishes no enduring good, since the lady she saved dies in a divine punishment for the murder of all the damsels she had killed in her quest for a cure. The maiden's blood has value, but not lasting value – it does not ultimately save the leprous lady from death" (9). It is certainly tempting to agree with

McCracken's assertion that the effect of Percival's sister's bloodshed is merely "local and specific" – it has no lasting effect, as the woman it cures is almost instantly destroyed for her sins – specifically, we would do well to note, the sin of shedding innocent women's blood (10).

But if we return to the maiden's own words of assent to the act of bloodshed, it appears that a different metric should be used to determine the efficacy of her action. Percival's sister agrees to donate her blood, knowing full well that it will likely kill her, because she knows that her own voluntary shedding of blood will prevent any more violence amongst the knights. In this, she is completely successful, as Sirs Percival, Galahad, and Bors are all able to leave the castle unscathed, without having shed any of their own blood, or anybody else's. Her filling of her own "grail" has, as other examples in this chapter, both healed *and* served as a substitute for another's woundedness, by healing the gentlewoman and forestalling the shedding of the knights' blood.

Percival, Galahad, and Bors's survival unscathed, while positive, is still not the ultimate factor determining the lasting effects of Percival's sister's bleeding. It is not whether the patient for whom Percival's sister sheds her blood survives that matters, but the very fact that she willingly, despite knowing the risks, sheds her blood, specifically for the benefit of others: for the gentlewoman, for those to come in her "lynyage" for whom she wants to secure worship,[19] and for her brother and his companions (591). As in all of the other works discussed in this chapter, Percival's sister's bleeding alone does not make her notable, but the fact that her decision to bleed is based on her relationship to other people does. As Dennis

[19] Although her virginal death of course forestalls her literal lineage, as she can now have no children or immediate descendants after her, her lineage is continued both in her brother, who remains alive to propagate his own bloodline, and, in a different sense, in the "blood-line" that is the literal expression of her blood, repeated for generations in both Malory and other accounts of the tale.

Slattery writes, “To be wounded is to be opened to the world; it is to be pushed off the straight, fixed, and predictable path of certainty and thrown into ambiguity, or onto the circuitous path, and into the unseen and unforeseen” (13). Percival’s sister suddenly finds herself on this ambiguous path, as some members of her community for whom she bleeds may not appreciate her chosen form of expression, or enjoy its benefits for longer than a night; but in opening herself into the dish proffered by the gentlewoman’s attendant knight, she opens herself to, and, in a small way, heals, a part of her larger community. Percival, Galahad, and Bors do not need to fight, and no more virgins must be sacrificed to the noblewoman. By opening herself, Percival’s sister has healed not only the disease suffered by the noblewoman, but the communal violence the woman has perpetrated. The fact that the lady receives her divine punishment only after her healing via Percival’s sister’s blood demonstrates that it is Percival’s sister’s deliberate and voluntary act of expression through bleeding that allows this social wound to heal, and the cycle of violence to be completed.

Conclusion

In Mintz’s words, “Wounds are sites and signs of an impassioned joining that blurs distinctions between human and divine, masculine and feminized bodies; pain signifies intimacy with as much as distance from” (21). As necessary as it is to acknowledge the “distance from” others that pain and wounds can signify and cause, I believe that in the instance of the examples explored in this chapter, the wounds and sites of bleeding that are and are not allowed to be made often lead to an “impassioned joining” through expression. In this joining, not only does the intended patient derive medical and physical relief via the bleeding and/or blood, but the edges distinguishing the individual who bleeds from others are blurred to the point of disappearing. While Mintz’s statement suggests simply one wounded

body joining with an intact one, this chapter has shown that, instead, the sites of the greatest intimacy between individuals occur specifically where one *willingly* wounds oneself (or allows oneself to be wounded) for the purpose of healing another's wound through the expression of their own.

CHAPTER TWO – BLOODINESS IN THE CRISIS OF CHIVALRY

"HONY SOIT QUI MAL PENCE": this line, added at the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in its only extant manuscript, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.x, has sparked years of scholarly debate. The declaration, a slightly incomplete version of the motto of the Order of the Garter, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," and in an arguably different hand from the rest of the poem, has prompted a veritable sea of ink to be spilled on the connections between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the Order of the Garter. Is Arthur's Round Table, as portrayed in the poem, meant to represent King Edward III's court, so profoundly shaped by the Order he founded? Is the girdle that features so prominently in the poem, and which Gawain wears on his return to Camelot at the poem's conclusion, a stand-in for the garter? One of the most compelling articles on the topic, W.G. Cooke and D'A J.D. Boulton's "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: A Poem for Henry of Grosmont?" argues in favor of reading the romance as a treatment of the Order of the Garter. Additionally, as the title of the article suggests, Cooke and Boulton contend that the *Gawain*-poet may have had Henry of Grosmont, the first duke of Lancaster and first cousin to Edward III, as his sponsor. Their evidence for this sponsorship (and the dating of the poem that they then perform based on this sponsorship) is strong, and this chapter, in particular, is greatly bolstered by the connection they make between *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Henry of Grosmont.

In 1354, Henry of Grosmont composed a treatise on sin and penance, titled *LeLivre de seyntz medicines*, or, *The Book of Holy Medicines*. As the title suggests, Henry's work relies primarily on the metaphor of illness and medicine in his discussion of sin and penance: each sin is a gaping, festering wound, and Christ and Mary's love, tears, and blood will, after

the proper penance is observed, heal these sinful wounds. “Now, Lord, if it please you, I shall show you my wounds,” Henry writes, calling to mind the scene of Troilus’ “unwreing” his wound to Pandarus, his leech (77). The embodied nature of Henry’s medical metaphor of penance acts as a key means of transition between the last chapter, focused on bleeding as physically healing, and this one, which considers the spiritually healing powers of bleeding, in particular as they are made use of within the ideals and limits of chivalry. This chapter focuses on the intersection between the spiritually therapeutic properties of bleeding and the deeply conflicted nature of vulnerability within the chivalric framework. Paragons of chivalry like Henry of Grosmont can recognize and extol the virtues of religious cleansing through metaphors of bleeding, yet remain entrenched in a societal network that simultaneously encourages and inhibits the very vulnerability needed for that cathartic bleeding to take place.

Medieval chivalry, as both an abstract ideal and a pragmatic code of conduct, was very contradictory when it came to vulnerability and bleeding. On the one hand, an essential part of being chivalrous was continually making oneself vulnerable, open in combat to wounding and death, and prioritizing honor and prowess far above bodily comfort. Geoffroi de Charny, a 14th-century French knight, wrote explicitly in his *Le livre de chevalerie* (*The Book of Chivalry*) that a knight “must in no way indulge in too great fondness for pampering [his] body, for love of that is the worst kind of love there is” (68). Charny goes on to expound on this scorn for hedonism, focusing particularly on the ways in which knights should reject both comfortable beds and extravagant foods. He also advises anyone considering knighthood to think carefully, as taking on the mantle of chivalry is not easy: “For, whoever might want to consider the hardships, pains, discomforts, fears, perils, broken

bones, and wounds which the good knights who uphold the order of knighthood as they should endure…" (95). While Charny extols the virtues of earthly knights denying themselves physical comforts, Lancaster compares Christ to a knight, observing that the disfiguring of Christ's nose during the Stations of the Cross reminds him that "a man who often frequents tournaments damages his nose more often than any other part" (195). He then compares Christ to a knight who "tourneyed so hard for us and won the tournament," making an intricate connection between Christ, acts of chivalry, and the beneficial power of vulnerability and bleeding (ibid). Vulnerability, then, and the willingness to be uncomfortable, to be wounded, and even to die in the name of honor and prowess were central to the ideals of chivalry.

At the same time, much of the practice of chivalry, particularly in the mid- to late-14th century, when both of the romances in this chapter were likely composed, allowed very little room for actual vulnerability to take place. In one respect, this can be seen in the sheer volume of rules and codes of knights' behavior. Charny's book, for example, is exhaustive in its lists of advice and guides for a knight's conduct in virtually every imaginable context and situation. This vast number of restrictive rules and guidelines, as I will particularly focus on in the chapter's discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* contained and constrained knights so tightly that any real vulnerability would have been difficult to achieve. At the same time that these restrictions heaped up, chivalry in the later Middle Ages came more and more to encompass knights who might never see any actual violence or combat. While knights of the period certainly saw combat in the Hundred Years War, many of the Orders founded at the time, including the Order of the Garter with which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is so enmeshed, were specifically created by rulers in order to direct their vassals'

militaristic energies into more ritualized and less violent pursuits. As Maurice Keen writes in his seminal work on chivalry, as early as the reigns in England of kings Richard I and Edward I, "The reduction of bloodshed and restraint upon the rancours which were so easily engendered in the heat of the affray were clearly among the principal objects of the rules of tournaments which were drawn up by (the kings)" (86). Tournament practices, as well as the institution of Orders, were more invested in giving to chivalrous societies, to use Keen's words again, "a flavour of romance and of honourable lustre by means of insignia and ceremonial, and to glamorise the activities of the orders by associating them with past glories and with the pursuit of idealistic goals whose honourable and ethical standing was not generally questioned" (190). That is to say, chivalry as practiced and honored in the latter half of the 14th century espoused ideals of vulnerability while simultaneously imposing on its practitioners such a strictly detailed and ritualistic, rather than dangerously violent, set of rules and conduct that no genuine vulnerability was possible to achieve. As Cooke and Boulton observe, the very object that, it could be said, ties the texts of this chapter together – the garter, or girdle – is an object imbued with the properties of giving its wearer some degree of invulnerability.[20] We see this in Henry of Grosmont's devotion to chivalry, specifically the Order of the Garter,[21] in the magic girdle that lands Gawain in such trouble but then transforms into a symbol of chivalry, and in the *other* magic girdle that Floripas allows Charlemagne's knights to wear to avoid death by starvation. Each iteration of this object reveals how, in each of these texts, our knightly figures attempt to embrace the

[20] Here I must offer considerable thanks to Cooke and Boulton, whose article, which I encountered late in the process of writing this chapter, showed me, in a way, why I had already chosen to put these three texts in dialogue with each other.

[21] "More than any other English magnate of his day except perhaps his cousin Edward III himself, Henry tried to practise chivalry after the Arthurian pattern," Cooke and Boulton write of Grosmont (46).

vulnerability they know they need, but ultimately fall victim to the temptations of invulnerability instead.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the romance with which the first section of this chapter is concerned, Gawain is constantly at the center of this crisis of vulnerability: his reputation as a paragon of chivalry demands an openness to his person, from his participation in the beheading game with the Green Knight to the love play the lady of the castle continually tries to engage him in; but, at the same time, that very reputation, as well as the behaviors he should follow according to it, keep him extremely constricted and closed off. Likewise Ferumbras, one of the heroes of *The Sowdon of Babylon*, the chapter's second primary text, is caught in this crisis. As much as he tries to perform Christian chivalry perfectly, including some dramatic shows of vulnerability, the Christian chivalric community embodied by Charlemagne and his knights refuses to open itself to him. As much as chivalry, as presented in these romances, promotes the ideals of vulnerability and intersubjectivity, when those moments actually take place, the chivalric communities reject their stories, effectively closing off their knights and their communities.

Sir Gawain the Too-Enclosed Knight

As I asserted in my analysis of Arcite in Chapter One, often being stopped up, or unable to bleed or express (either physically or verbally) one's ailment can be fatal. Like Arcite, Gawain suffers, for the majority of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, from being too closed, both literally and figuratively. Unlike Arcite, however, Gawain is not in some way stopped up or clotted; instead, the metaphor most accurate for Gawain – and the one used most by the text itself – is of being too closed, and completely lacking in vulnerability until the wound inflicted at the end of the poem by the Green Knight (and then again immediately

thereafter). From the lengthy descriptions of all the ways in which Gawain is enclosed in his armor before setting off on his journey, to his entrapment inside the bed curtains by Bertilak's wife, to the very wrapped nature of the girdle he accepts from her, Gawain is so contained that he cannot attain any real vulnerability or intersubjectivity; not, that is, until the Green Knight opens his flesh and Gawain himself at the poem's end. Certainly, Gawain's achievement of vulnerability is complicated by the final scene: Gawain's decision to continue to wear the girdle as a symbol of his failures continues to keep him contained, and the laughter of the rest of the court at Camelot implies a reluctance to hear or acknowledge his narrative of vulnerability. I contend that the poem, which, as W.R.J. Barron notes, "begins on New Year's Day, the Feast of the Circumcision commemorating Christ's first shedding of his blood for man," ultimately determines that Gawain's true fault lies not in the taking and keeping of the girdle, but in his own inability to be vulnerable (and to bleed), signified by the girdle (Trawthe *and Treason*, 113).[22]

Initially, Gawain's intense aversion to vulnerability seems to align with Lancaster's assertion about the dangers of openness. In a gesture in line with medieval doctrine regarding the senses as the primary means of sin's entrance to the soul, Lancaster begins his treatise by offering to show Christ his wounds, "seven in all: The first is the ear: The second the eye: The third the nose: The fourth the mouth: The fifth the hand: The sixth the foot: The seventh the heart" (77). While these seven wounds/body parts most clearly each correspond to the senses, the first four are also, notably, the body's natural orifices, sites where, like wounds,

[22] Isabel Davis, in her essay on skin in *SGGK* and "The Wife of Bath's Tale," notes that Gawain's relationship with the girdle goes beyond one of representation, and becomes one of identification: "Instead Gawain comes to identify with the girdle, another textile that resembles his skin: ruptured and imperfect. Gawain, like Adam, blames woman before making a full confession, revealing his own skin-bound susceptibility" (114). This paradox of the girdle – does it represent his refusal of vulnerability, or is it an emblem of that very vulnerability – is central to the decidedly unsettled feeling with which the romance ends, discussed in greater detail below.

evil can enter the body, and, consequently, the soul. Lancaster is acutely aware of the dangers offered by such natural orifices, as well as any artificial ones created by wounds, for his spiritual health. "Everything that has come out of that evil wound," he says about his mouth, "has also come in by it" (118). If sin and putrefaction can enter the body through its natural openings, what more can enter it through violent wounds? The more evil that enters, Lancaster believes, the more evil is likely to be performed by the sinner. Accordingly, Gawain's obsession with virtual invulnerability makes sense. However, Lancaster also recognizes an important feature of that vulnerability that Gawain does not seem to: the opportunity both for those openings to eventually let the sin and infection *out* of the body, cleansing it, and also for those sites of aperture to admit good, wholesome things *into* the body. Of his ears, Lancaster writes that they "are so stuffed with sins that your (Christ's) sweet offices – whether masses, matins, vespers, or anything else, even good sermons – can only enter fleetingly" (78). For the bad to exit the body and soul, leaving both pure and cleansed, an opening is necessary. And without an opening of any sort, the good cannot come in. Unfortunately for him, it is this last idea that Gawain cannot quite seem to grasp. So terrified by the prospect of what bad might enter him if he leaves himself vulnerable, Gawain prevents both the successful purgation of any sin from himself, as well as the entrance into his body and soul of any wholesome things that might bring him closer to both God and his community – that is, intersubjectivity.

From his first speech in the poem, Gawain highlights the importance of his blood, going so far as to claim that it is the only important part of him. Rising to prevent Arthur from accepting the Green Knight's challenge, Gawain asserts the appropriateness of his own taking on of the game, by avowing his own inferiority:

I am the wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,

And lest luf of my lif, who laytes the soth.

Bot for as much as ye are myne em I am only to prayse,

No bounty bot your blode I in my body knowe. (ll. 354-357)

Weakest, least intelligent, and overall least worthy of all the Knights of the Round Table, Gawain claims that, since the fact that Arthur's blood runs through his veins is the only extraordinary thing about himself, he should behead the Green Knight, as the loss of his own head would be the least loss for Camelot. As David Aers reminds us, the blood invoked here is "so important in the class's self-identity," referring to the class of King Arthur's court (160). Gawain is, from the very first time he speaks and properly enters the narrative, simultaneously focused on his blood, his lineage, and his own self-identity within the class and community of Camelot. Gawain's avowal that his blood is the only worthy thing about himself strengthens the dramatic importance of that blood the next time we see it – spilled in the snow by Bertilak. Since it is his blood that is the only thing that gives him value, the spilling of it in the final confrontation both lessens his worth, as that blood is no longer contained within his body, and also highlights his worth, as, for the first time in the whole poem, that worthy blood is actually visible, rather than being concealed within his tightly confined body. Gawain's nobility can best be shown specifically through his vulnerability, made visually obvious through the cut on his neck. While Gawain sets out to prove, over the course of the rest of the romance, that he possesses more virtue than the blood of his uncle running through his veins, it is more often than not his anxiety for that blood to remain contained, and his corresponding refusal to be vulnerable, that gets in the way of his more chivalrous undertakings.

If Gawain has any value or worth, it is, for the duration of the poem, tightly confined within him, as he is within his armor. The passage detailing the arming of Sir Gawain, running over 100 lines, from line 565 through 669, contains fifteen verbs relating to fastening, tightening, and enclosing.[23] Of course, it is not Gawain himself who fastens himself into these restrictive clothes, but, as was the common practice for medieval knights, he is put into them by his attendants: "Then set *thay* the sabatouns upon the segge fotes, / His legges lapped in stole with lovely greves…" (ll. 574-574, emphasis added). Although, as noted, this practice was hardly unusual, the passive nature of Gawain's enclosure is heightened throughout the passage, emphasizing the ways in which the man who should be an active, daring knight is completely content to allow himself to be so enclosed and constricted. Although he repeats this passive behavior several times, both in allowing himself to be contained by others and in obsessively encasing himself when openness is offered to him, it quickly becomes clear that his desire for safety and invulnerability prevents him from achieving his chivalric goals. How can the man even move in this bulky, unyielding outfit and suit of armor, let alone express his true value as a knight and as a man?

Even that symbol meant to represent the knightly virtues Gawain exemplifies is an "endeles knot," denoting the infinitely constricted nature of the values and restrictions imposed on him (l. 630). If one were to pull on one end of an endless knot, the knot would simply tighten even further. Certainly, it is a positive thing to imagine the five knightly virtues as so inextricably connected to each other. The tension on one thread, as it were, as one of the five virtues is tested, should strengthen the others in response. Nevertheless, the

[23] Davis notes that, in addition to this obsession with attaching and fastening, "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* perhaps most explicitly is preoccupied by hanging and folding forms – in clothing, bed linen, and animal skins; it is a pleated poem, proliferating du*pli*cates and tri*pli*cates" (101, emphasis original). It seems to me that these two fixations of the poem – fastening and folding – are linked in their focus on enclosure and containment.

image of an endless knot, in the midst of the description of the constrictive arming of Gawain, has noticeably physical connotations. Thus, when the narrator says that "these pure fyve (virtues) / Were harder happed on that hathel then on any other," the reader can read behind the praise of Gawain as the epitome of knightliness a condemnation of the society which has forcefully "happed" those values on him, perhaps without his consent (ll. 654-655). "Happe," defined by the MED as a form of the verb "haspen," meaning to fasten, to wrap, to enclose, to embrace, echoes the physical enclosures of Gawain's suit of armor, and is, in its passive voice, once more an action quietly received by Gawain, as he is enclosed further into a pre-determined identity.

Indeed, this external application of the concept of knightliness to Gawain is recalled later in the poem when, upon his arrival at Bertilak's castle, he is gladly welcomed by the members of the court, who are eager to ascribe to him the quintessence of chivalry:

> 'Now schal we seemly se slyghtes of thewes
> And the techles termes of talkyng noble.
> Wich spede is in speche unspurred may we lerne,
> Syn we have fonged that fine fader of nurture.
> God has geven us his grace goodly for sothe,
> That such a gest as Gawayn grauntes us to have
> When burnes blithe of his brthe shal sitte
> And syng.' (ll. 916-927)

Gawain is certainly praised here, but in such a way that, since he cannot possibly measure up to his apparent reputation as the paragon of courtly virtue, it feels as forced upon him as the

virtues are “happed” on him. For, when such qualities are pinned upon someone so vehemently, what can he do but fail to live up to them?

Once this constrictive armor and the virtues just as restrictive are placed upon him and he is fastened within, Gawain is unable to doff it for quite some time. In the oddly rushed part of the romance that quickly mentions the many adventures Gawain faces on his journey to find the Green Chapel, the narrator mentions that, during the heart of winter in the English/Welsh marches, Gawain “Nere slayn with the slete he slepte in his yrnes / Mo nightes then innogh in naked rokkes” (ll. 729-730). While the lengthy description above of the arming process explains the practicality of Gawain’s remaining in his armor for the duration of his journey, even while asleep, the imagery is desolate. The poor young knight spends his freezing nights trapped within a suit which, for all of its enclosure and tightness, cannot offer that much in the way of comforting warmth. Indeed, the reader can hear in the alliteration of the “s” sound in line 729 the shiver of a man trying to warm himself inside the harsh confines of metal. Especially interesting is the poet’s use of the word “yrnes” to describe Gawain’s armor. While the Middle English Dictionary does include a definition of “iren” as “armor; a piece of armor,” the word, especially when used as a plural noun, also calls to mind the fetters or chains with which a prisoner is bound, and the MED provides that definition as well: “an iron chain; a prisoner’s fetter.” Gawain is held captive within his irons, completely contained. Wendy Clein’s analysis agrees with mine: “The poet’s choice of the word ‘yrnes’ instead of ‘armes’ or ‘harnays’ draws attention to the uncomfortable metallic war gear and underscores the hero’s distress” (94). Barron comments on the futility of this scene, “reducing the panoply of arms to a comfortless icy carapace” (Trawthe *and Treason*, 19).Rather than protecting him, Gawain’s armor somewhat paradoxically restrains

him in a pose of exposure to the elements. His armor, then, seems to embody much of what I have so far termed in this chapter the crisis of vulnerability within chivalry: the armor simultaneously acts as an outward signifier of his status as a knight and therefore within the chivalric community; theoretically protects him, therefore undermining any value chivalry ostensibly places on vulnerability; and leaves him in a startlingly vulnerable position in relation to the elements, as it restrains him in its cold embrace.

Unfortunately for Gawain, he is not freed or left unrestrained as soon as he finds shelter from the cold. Although Hautdesert, the castle of Lord Bertilak, appears out of the mist immediately after Gawain has prayed to Mary for a warm place to sleep and pay observance to the solemnities of Christmas, it is not quite the refuge it initially seems to be. The language the poet uses to describe the castle paints it as equally enclosing and restraining as Gawain's armor. The castle is, as many medieval castles, "in a mote, / … loken under boghes / Of mony borelych bole aboute by the diches," penned in by both man-made and natural barricades, protecting the castle with water and trees (ll. 764-766). As Barron writes, in these depictions, "everything speaks of protection within…and resistance without" (Trawthe *and Treason*, 7). In addition to its more natural defenses, the castle is also said to be "a pyked palays pyned ful thik," and Gawain is able to penetrate its strong walls only when those inside deliberately let down the bridge for him (l. 769). Indeed, that letting down of the bridge to allow him entry reveals that, in at least one sense, the strength of Bertilak's castle is indeed fortified by its willingness to be vulnerable at times, a lesson Gawain cannot learn. Once he enters, he is – or at least he feels himself to be – trapped. Likewise, the imagery of the castle "pared out of papure purely hit semed" reminds us (and should remind Gawain) that, much like Gawain's supposed invulnerability, the strongest castle can be destroyed quite

easily when its true vulnerability is perceived (l. 802). Unfortunately for Gawain, that which should offer him respite and which, at first glance, does certainly offer protection, comes with the same price of his armor: enclosure and restraint.

Even without his armor, Hautdesert continues to contain Gawain, both within the castle itself, and within his individual room as well. As soon as he is at his seemingly most vulnerable – disarmed, disrobed, and lying in bed half asleep his first morning in Sir Bertilak's castle, he is immediately restrained again – by the bedclothes, by the chamber he sleeps in, and, most significantly, by Bertilak's wife. While Bertilak and his men head out on their first hunt, Gawain slumbers in bed, "Under covertour ful celere, cortayned aboute" (l. 1181). Aers writes of Gawain's enclosure within the bed curtains as the creation of a new realm: "In the public world and its heroic word [*sic*] a domestic sphere has suddenly been opened out or, depending on one's perspectives, closed in" (163) I see the tension of in and out that Aers writes of as happening instantly – as soon as this new sphere is opened *out* of the world at large for Gawain to enjoy comfortably, it is immediately opened – and then closed – *in* on him.

His surrounding by the bed curtains initially seems protective, but as soon as the lady of the castle enters the room, they, and the room itself, become imprisoning. Hearing a noise in the chamber, Gawain peeks through the curtains to see the lady enter his room and draw "the dor after hir ful dernly and stille," locking him into the room (l. 1188). Just as in the case of his armor, objects that should offer shelter and security take on a more restrictive role. Even Gawain's body becomes an enclosed space: after feigning sleep at her entrance, he is forced to pretend to awaken, at which point he "unlouked his ye-liddes," reluctantly, but with no other choice, opening his body to her (l. 1201). The MED does define the verb

"unlouken," in its figurative sense, as "to open (one's eyelids, one's lips); spread wide (one's legs); stretch forth (one's finger), extend." Its more literal sense, however, suggests that even his own physique could become a space in which Gawain can "lock" himself, speaking volumes about the length to which Gawain is willing to go to keep himself as contained as possible. As the lady climbs into bed with him, Gawain's literal imprisonment becomes even more obvious, and his figurative entrapment within the lady's scheming becomes apparent as well. Caught as he is in the room, and now the bed, Gawain cannot help but engage with the lady; in that engagement, she manages to quickly catch him in the snare of his reputation as the epitome of courtly love and manners.

Upon her entrance into his chamber, the lady of the castle is immediately marked as open in a way that Gawain is not, despite his nakedness under the blankets. While Gawain is constantly pulling his bedclothes around him more tightly, fighting at all times to remain contained and enclosed, the lady wears clothes that explicitly leave her exposed and open, especially in parts of the body remarkable for both their sexiness and vulnerability. Although her clothes are not described until her third visit to Gawain's chamber, they are then described almost scandalously: "Hir thriven face and hir throte throwen all naked, / Hir brest bare before and bihinde eke" (ll. 1740-1741). Gawain's lack of comment on this later vestment suggests that she has been dressing this way all along, exposing herself – particularly at the breast and neck, the most vulnerable parts of the human body – in marked contrast to Gawain's enclosure in the bedclothes.

When, on the morning of her first visit, Gawain moves to rise from the bed, she immediately stops him:

'Ye schal not rise of your bed, I riche yow better:

I schal *happe* yow here that other half als,

And sithen carp with my knight that I *caght* have.

For I wene wel, iwis, Sir Wawayn ye are,

That all the worlde worschypes whereso ye ride;

Your honour, your hendelayk is hendly prasyed

With lords, with ladies, with all that lif bere.' (ll. 1223-1229, emphasis added)

Her language, including the self-aware reference to having "caght" Gawain, has led countless scholars to explore the parallels between the hunting scenes of Bertilak and his men and the bedroom scene, comparing the deer, boar, and fox hunts to the Gawain hunt performed by Bertilak's wife.[24] For the sake of my argument, I am less interested in seeing the lady as hunting Gawain as I am in seeing her entrapping and confining him, particularly as this entrapment relates to his reputation. Interestingly, the poet once more uses the word "happe," explored above in the scene of Gawain's arming. In this context, the word has an explicitly physical sense, as the lady refers to fastening Gawain to the bed so that he cannot leave. Especially significant when considering the previous use of "happe," this example is also about the forcing of a certain reputation on Gawain. Just as he is unable to escape the five knightly virtues "happed" on him more strongly than any other man, Gawain is powerless to escape lady Bertilak's trapping of him because she desires the sexual aspects of his courtly reputation. Once more, Gawain is physically prevented from being other than what his community expects of him – whether that is the paragon of virtue, or the epitome of courtly

[24] See, for example: Henry L. Savage, "The Significance of the Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 27.1, 1928, pp. 1-15; J.D. Burnley, "The Hunting Scenes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Yearbook of English Studies*, 3, 1973, pp. 1-9; Avril Henry, "Temptation and Hunt in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Medium Ævum*, 45.2, 1976, pp. 187-200; and Muriel Ingham and Lawrence Barkley, "Further Animal Parallels in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Chaucer Review*, 13.4, 1979, pp. 384-386.

love – and the lady does not leave his bed, allowing him freedom, until she has received a kiss. The repetition of this pattern on the next day and the one following, in which Gawain finds himself trapped in what should be an entirely desirable position, if his reputation were accurate, but which is quite clearly very discomfiting for him, emphasizes the manner in which Gawain constantly finds himself bodily contained and constrained by the expectations and conflicting ideals of chivalry.

As the pattern of Gawain's entrapment by the lady is repeated, so is the pattern of the hunt by Bertilak and his men. As stated above, my argument here is less concerned with the common comparison of the two scenes focused on portraying Bertilak's wife as hunting Gawain. I am, however, quite interested in the ways in which the prey of the various hunts are contrasted: while Gawain suffers in his chamber, contained both in body and behavior, the deer, boar, and fox, are all, though caught and killed by the hunters, simultaneously not so constrained into specific cultural or social roles as Gawain. In particular, the scene depicting the butchery of the deer is perhaps the bloodiest of the entire poem. Lasting over thirty lines, the passage details the careful removal of the deer's innards, the delicate separation of the hide from the body, and finally, the feeding of the hounds with the offal: "Upon a felle of the fayr best fede thay their houndes / With the lyver and the lyghtes, the lether of the paunches, / And bred bathed in blode, blent theramonges" (ll. 1359-1361).[25] I do not mean to suggest that this depiction somehow gives the deer a freedom Gawain does not have – the deer is dead, while Gawain is simply deeply uncomfortable. However, the

[25] I believe that Carolyn Dinshaw's analysis of the scene, seemingly so different from mine, is actually fundamentally similar. "I suggest," she writes, "that this unlacing of the body is the poem's visual representation of straight gender identity failing" ("A Kiss is Just a Kiss," 214). While my argument does not address sexuality in the poem, I see, like Dinshaw, the careful butchery of the deer representing and responding to a key facet of Gawain's identity.

deliberate detail of the blood-dipped bread being fed to the dogs,[26] rather than thrown away, seems to grant the deer a place in the natural cycle of predation, a form of literal expression of itself into the world, that Gawain is denied while trapped in bed.

Gawain is finally allowed the chance for that freedom, and with it, redemption, in the poem's climactic scene. Presenting himself to the Green Knight for his promised stroke to the neck, Gawain "schewed that schyre all bare / And let as he noght dutte," exposing the skin on the back of his neck (ll. 2256-2257). For the first time, Gawain reveals a site of vulnerability on his person – rather than concealing himself in restrictive armor or containing bed sheets, he bares his neck, literally leaving himself open to the potential violence of the Green Knight's axe. Aers writes of the scene that, "The poet mentions the bare white flesh of the knight's neck to evoke the human vulnerability with which heroic traditions contend" (167). Gawain's attempt at fitting into those heroic traditions, and at exposing his own vulnerability, however, proves to be not quite enough, as his instincts still will not allow him to render himself truly defenseless. Shrinking away from "the scharp yrn"[27] and flinching, Gawain temporarily avoids injury, but incurs the scorn of the Green Knight (l. 2267). "'Thou art not Gawayn,' quoth the gome, 'that is so good holden, / That never arwed for no here by hille ne by vale, / And now thou fles for ferde ere thou fele harmes!'" he scolds, once again unfavorably contrasting Gawain's reputation with his actions (ll. 2270-2272). As we have seen before, in the "happing" of Gawain's chivalric virtues and reputation to him, there seem

[26] Trevor Dodman writes of the offal that, "the *Gawain*-poet sees such innards not as waste excluded from meaning, but as base matter that helps to knot together subaltern male performances…" (430). I, too, understand the guts of the deer as being eminently meaningful, though in somewhat different ways. I find it especially interesting that Dinshaw (note above) thinks of the scene as an "unlacing," while Dodman as a means of "knot[ting] together."

[27] One cannot help but recall the discussion of "yrnes" above; here, the word quite clearly has the meaning, per the MED, of "a weapon or weapon head made of iron or steel." This obviously threatening meaning of the word here adds another dimension to that earlier discussion, and to the earlier use of the term.

to be external constraints forcing Gawain into specific behavior. Aers writes evocatively that, in this moment, "the knight feels his identity dissolving, his being disintegrating," as the role into which he and others have so tightly placed him stops protecting him (169). It is no coincidence, I believe, that this moment of "disintegration" comes immediately adjacent to the moment of Gawain's sudden vulnerability: much to his chagrin, he initially finds that his response to exposing his boundaries is to feel as if his self is falling apart, leaking out of the new opening. Despite this feeling of self-dissolution, in the next moment, the reader sees Gawain deliberately choose, for the first time since his decision to accept the Green Knight's challenge (itself a decision somewhat forced by Arthur's rash behavior) to pursue a specific, chivalric, course of action – and it is one that makes him ultimately vulnerable.

Apologizing for his wince (while also reminding the Green Knight that, unlike him, Gawain cannot re-attach his head once it's been lopped off), Gawain promises to stand still for the next blow, and he does; but the blow never comes. Despite a fearsome swing, the Green Knight "Withhelde hetterly his hande ere hit hurt myght," and leaves Gawain standing "stille as the stone," confused, and mortified (ll. 2291, 2293). Angry that his giant foe seems to be taunting him with the feint, Gawain demands that the other man "thresch on," essentially commanding his own beheading (l. 2300). For the first time, the reader sees Gawain embodying what Clein describes as the fundamental aspect of chivalric fame: "As the representative of his culture's heroic ideal, he (the knight) wins respect by risking his life" (56). At last, Gawain is actively making himself vulnerable, to the extreme of nearly losing his head. Although Gawain is not beheaded, this third stroke of the axe does land on his neck, and the language used by the poet here recalls that of the scene of the butchering of the deer: "The scharp schrank to the flesch thurgh the schyre grece, / That the schene blode

over his schulderes schot to the erthe" (ll. 2313-2314). No longer contained within his protective yet restricting armor, nor the comforting yet imprisoning bedclothes, nor, at last, even his own skin, Gawain has been opened, and his blood flows onto the earth, perhaps finally allowing a therapeutic – even purgative or penitential – vulnerability and intersubjectivity to begin.

The sight of Gawain's red blood in the New Year's Day snow is stark, and startles both him and the reader:

> And when the burn sey the blode blenk on the snowe,
> He sprit forth spenne-fote more then a spere lenkthe,
> Hent hitterly his helme and on his hed cast,
> Schot with his schulderes his fayr schelde under… (ll. 2315-2318).

Gawain is so alarmed by the blatant physical evidence of his vulnerability that he immediately re-arms, once more enveloping himself in his layers of protection. While I will return to this problematic re-covering of himself in a moment, for now I focus on the Green Knight, and his interpretation of Gawain's bleeding. Laughing heartily at Gawain's quick leap away and threat to fight him should he try one more than his promised blow, the Green Knight assures the other man that all fight between them is over. Revealing himself to be the Lord Bertilak, and explaining his own role in the several appearances of his wife in Gawain's chamber, the Green Knight laughs once more at Gawain's shame for his misdeeds being known, and comforts him that, "Thou art confessed so clene, beknowen of thy mysses, / And has the penaunce apert of the point of myne egge" (ll. 2391-2392). Through both the

confession that Gawain has made to the priest before departing Hautdesert,[28] and his wound at "the point of (Bertilak's) edge," he is, the jolly green giant proclaims, cleansed and free of all sin.

Underscoring my argument that Gawain's difficulties lie primarily in his over-enclosure, Bertilak also specifies the exact reason he let the third blow land on Gawain's neck at all. The first two days of Gawain's stay, he explains, the knight dutifully and chivalrously honored his exchange with Bertilak, granting him the kisses won by his wife in exchange for the spoils of the hunt. But, Bertilak reminds him, "At the third thou fayled thore, / And therfore that tappe ta the" (ll. 2356-2357). On the third day, the reader remembers, Gawain gave his host the kisses he had won, but not the girdle he accepted from the lady of the castle. That instead, believed to save his life in any circumstance, remained *wrapped around his body*. I emphasize the last phrase because it is crucial to understand that, ultimately, a key aspect of Gawain's crime is wrapping, protecting, concealing, and enveloping himself: avoiding and denying his own vulnerability. Robert Goltra astutely observes that, through his acceptance of the girdle, "Gawain has committed a mortal sin in his inordinate fear, fear which leads him to trust his life to a magic-token, the girdle, rather than to God" (9). It is Gawain's intense fear of vulnerability that leads him into sin. Likewise, Andrea Hopkins draws our attention to the fact that "[t]he words used of Gawain's fault – faut, fals, fylthe, feintise, forfet, surfet" almost all begin with the letter F, that letter with which many of the virtues listed in the arming scene begin (215 fn. 27). I agree with Hopkins that this alliterative choice reminds us of the ideals of which Gawain has fallen so

[28] It is worth noting that a wealth of scholarship exists debating the validity of Gawain's confession. For examples, see Aers, 165-170; Barron, Trawthe *and Treason*, 113-145; Hopkins, 204-218; V.J. Scattergood, 15-18. For my argument, Bertilak's apparent acceptance of Gawain's penance is of more importance.

short. I also understand this alliteration as explicitly recalling for us the way in which those virtues were said to be "happed" onto Gawain, enclosing him within certain expectations as he was enclosed within his armor.

Gawain's failures, however, stem from allowing himself to stay locked inside those conflicting and constraining expectations, without negotiating his own boundaries. Instead of actively using those virtues attributed to him so frequently to his advantage, he has passively allowed them to become his armor against vulnerability, and has consequently erred greatly. The Green Knight's exploitation and emphasis of that vulnerability that Gawain so fears, then, through the nicking of Gawain's neck to the point of drawing blood, leads Gawain to be able, through his bleeding into the snow, to, for a moment, undo that crime and purge himself of his sin. Benjamin D. Utter significantly refers to Bertilak as having "finally administered a salutary bleeding to Gawain," explicitly defining the wounding as being beneficial to Gawain (134). While Utter uses medicalizing language reminiscent of my own work in Chapter One, I find this scene of bleeding to be therapeutic for Gawain's soul as well as his body, as the two are so intertwined at this point, linked through the embodied metaphor of bleeding as penance. As his flesh is finally opened, Gawain is purged of his crimes, and Bertilak forgives him all.

Unfortunately, Gawain is not able to forgive himself, nor is he able to recognize that he actually needs to maintain that level of vulnerability for his own spiritual and social benefit. As mentioned above, his immediate reaction to the stark sight of his red blood on the white ground is to leap away and promptly re-arm himself, once more closing himself off to the rest of the world. Although the Green Knight's immediate laugh should relax him, Gawain stays tense, and as the other man reveals both that he was the source of Gawain's

tests and that he is aware of Gawain's shortcomings, Gawain blushes. "All the blode of his brest blent in his face," the narrator tells us, a typical enough description of what it is to blush (l. 2371). I find notable in this blush, however, that the rushing of Gawain's blood to his face, rather than, say, out of the fresh wound on his neck, reminds us that he is once more closed in, and his blood has nowhere else to go but his face.[29] Much like Arcite, trapped in a body that will not (or cannot) bleed, Gawain has trapped himself in, denying himself the access to any further benefits through bleeding. Hopkins argues that, in this moment, the opportunity for and expectation of Gawain's repentance is denied, for both Gawain and the reader. The fault for that denial and disappointment, Hopkins contends, rests in the key fact that, despite his obvious shame and remorse, Gawain "does not express any sorrow at having offended God, and he does not ask God for forgiveness" (209). Following Hopkins' logic, then, Gawain is asking the wrong person – Bertilak – for his pardon, and it is therefore no surprise that, even when that is given to him freely and warmly, "Gawain himself is not eased by this absolution; he seems to feel that the offence goes deeper and he cannot forgive himself" (ibid). While I agree with Hopkins that Gawain (and, along with him, the reader) is deeply unsatisfied with the absolution that Bertilak grants him, I think it stems more from his own anxious self-containment than from his refusal to ask forgiveness from God. His insistence on immediately re-enclosing himself seems to me less a denial of the divine judgment he may deserve, and more the result of his complete inability to leave himself open to anyone else, be it Bertilak or God.

[29] Valerie Allen notes in her essay on blushing and shame in *SGGK* that, "After Eden, the naked body is a blushing body" (191). While this observation makes the important connection between the emotion of shame and the physical reaction of blushing, I am also intrigued by the connection she makes between nakedness and blushing, especially since the naked body is a vulnerable body, and Gawain blushes precisely when he has just re-donned his clothes and armor. Perhaps Gawain understands, on some level, that this re-dressing of himself, although it theoretically makes him invulnerable, is as shameful as nakedness.

Gawain's return to self-enclosure lasts for the remainder of the poem. Upon his return to the Round Table, he faces the censure of his community, which, as Dyan Elliott points out, can be considered as taking on the role of a more heavenly censure, as medieval thought often "associate[ed] the communal gaze with the divine gaze," when it came to public sin and penance (79). When Gawain approaches this judging gaze, he comes still wearing the green girdle he took from Bertilak's wife, "A bende abelef him aboute," as a reminder of his sins (l. 2517). Not only is the girdle wrapped around him, but it is "Loken under his lyfte arme, the lace, with a knot," explicitly returning him to his earlier state of restrained enclosure, even in the absence of his armor (l. 2487). To both Bertilak before he departs and to the court of King Arthur upon arrival he explains that he wears the girdle "When I ride in renoun remorde to myselven / The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed, / How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe" (ll. 2434-2436). That is to say, he has completely missed the point. To remind himself of, and, thereby, to avoid, the weakness of the flesh – that weakness which, as shown above, is what briefly grants him redemption and intersubjectivity with Bertilak, the only other character in the poem to openly embrace vulnerability – he once more wraps himself up. Although Gawain's wearing of the girdle is more symbolically enveloping than the physical containment provided by his armor, it nevertheless remains an example of the knight deliberately enclosing himself, allowing his blood no way out, and no opening for intersubjective connections with others.[30] Therefore, while I agree with Kevin Marti's assertion that Gawain "wears the green girdle (a 'transformation' of the pentangle) as a sign of" his flaw, I disagree that the cut to his neck is a "corporeal 'flaw'" analogous to his failure

[30] Michael Twomey calls attention to the fact that the language Gawain uses when he describes the way he will wear the girdle – "'For there hit ones is tached twynne wil hit never'" – recalls once more the language of attaching, fastening, and closing seen in the arming scene (l. 2512, Twomey 92).

to adhere to knightly ideals (159). While Gawain quite obviously believes that the cut and the girdle it covers are both representative of his flaws – to use Utter's words, Gawain bears both his wound and the girdle "not as tokens of victory, but as symbols of his failure" – what I contend – and what Gawain continually misses – is that the cut potentially provides him a means of atoning for his flaws, an atonement thus made impossible by his insistence on wearing the girdle (151). Clein stipulates that, "For the knight who defined himself publicly and privately by a symbol connoting perfection, nothing can heal the wound to his sense of identity" (122). I contend that, in re-enveloping himself, and refusing to expose his wound to the air and the world, he inflicts this permanent state of unhealedness upon himself.

Rather than enjoying the relief of his completed penitence, Gawain re-appears at Camelot still ashamed, and "The blode in his face con melle" as he recounts his story (l. 2503). In response to his story, rather than acknowledging his account of shame and pathos, the Round Table merely laughs, turning the entire episode – as well as the girdle and the vulnerability it should denote – into a joke. As Aers notes, "the poem simply does not show Gawain being 'reincorporated' at its conclusion" (175). I take Aers' use of the term "reincorporated" on a literal as well as a figurative level: as Gawain maintains his insistence on the enclosure of his own body, the body of his community – the Round Table – remains closed to him, and will not allow him in.[31] Likewise, Clein observes that, specifically, "The laughter at the end of the poem has the effect of distancing the hero from other Round Table knights" (7).

[31] While Tania Colwell writes of "the court's acceptance of the Knight's girdle, as it briefly recognizes the permeable and fallible nature of masculine embodiment…" I disagree that the laugh of the court signifies such an acceptance (156). Instead, I read the laughter of the Round Table as an explicit refusal to hear Gawain talk about his newly-recognized permeability and fallibility.

Although Gawain's narrative is not precisely a narrative of an illness, Camelot's response to it – or rather, failure of a response to it – can be productively compared to the physician who fails to acknowledge and respond to their patient's narrative. As Arthur W. Frank notes, stories of illness and injury are often "told *through* a wounded body. The stories that ill people tell come out of their bodies" (2, emphasis original). Gawain's story is as much a story told about and through the wound on his neck as anything else, and yet his community fails to acknowledge his telling of it. By refusing to recognize Gawain's account of his wound and of his vulnerability, the Round Table demonstrates its extreme reluctance to even entertain the realities of vulnerability and its place within chivalry. As they deny those realities, they simultaneously fail to be the kinds of physicians Rita Charon writes about, the ones who, in listening to and understanding their patients' narratives, practice a form of medicine that "is focused on the fully envisioned plight of each patient, of each caregiver, of each institution of health care, and of the *whole society that suffers and that tries to heal*" (13, emphasis added). By refusing to acknowledge the narrative of Gawain's vulnerability, the Round Table denies any vulnerability of their own as well, emphasizing once more as the poem comes to a close the deep conflicting notions of vulnerability within the framework of chivalry. Thus Gawain remains, at the end of the poem, simultaneously self-excluded from the community at large and too contained, as he maintains himself confined in his position of isolation. Unfortunately, the absolution that Gawain receives as a result of his bleeding at the hands of the Green Knight is all too short-lived, as he cannot – or will not – maintain his own vulnerability.

Ferumbras and His Blody Woundes Fyve

Unlike Gawain, who is unable to persist in his vulnerability through the end of his tale, Ferumbras, the son of the titular character in the 14th/15th century romance *The Sowdon of Babylon*, not only embraces his vulnerability and carries it through to the end of the poem, but he deliberately seeks it out. Additionally, despite Barron's assertion that the Middle English poem "virtually ignores the spiritual theme in the original" French *chanson* from which it derives, I contend that the imagery of Ferumbras' "blody woundes fyve" is overtly Christian, calling to mind the sacrifice of Christ and the purging of the sins of humanity through his blood (*English Medieval Romance*, 101). Ferumbras' eager, Christ-like bleeding is juxtaposed with both the gruesome imbibing of wild animal blood by the Saracens before battle, as well as the bloody nose of one of the paragons of Christian knighthood, Roland, emphasizing Ferumbras' penance, and the sincerity of his conversion to Christianity. Although it is clear to the reader that Ferumbras has, through his vulnerability, purged himself of the sinful blood of Saracen-hood, Charlemagne reveals an ultimate inability to accept him into the Christian community. As Ferumbras is left behind in Spain at the end of the poem, along with Sir Guy, who has married Ferumbras' sister Floripas, it becomes clear that it is actually the Christian community, primarily Charlemagne, that is unable to open its borders and show itself to be vulnerable.

Relatively early on in the poem, just after Laban the Sultan has, along with Ferumbras and the rest of his army, successfully taken and sacked the city of Rome, the Saracens celebrate and pay homage to their gods in a distinctly un-Christian way:

> And to his goddes offrynge he made.
>
> He and his sone Sir Ferumbras
>
> Here goddis of golde did fade;

Thai brente frankensense

That smoked up so stronge

The fume in her presence,

It lasted alle alonge.

Thai blewe hornes of bras;

Thai dronke beestes bloode.

Milke and hony ther was,

That was roial and goode. (ll. 676-686, emphasis added)

That the drinking of beasts' blood is mentioned along with the other explicitly Saracen/pagan practices of polytheism, ritual sacrifice, and the burning of incense is enough alone to emphasize the un-Christianness of this action. I am particularly interested in the depiction of this practice, however, because, as it is the consumption of blood, it serves as the physical antithesis to the penance offered by the purgation of blood. Rather than emptying themselves of blood and, along with it, the sins of their Saracen-ness, the Sultan and his followers are ingesting it, explicitly making themselves more sinful and un-Christian. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that medieval theories of ethnic and racial otherness often contended that Saracens' dark skin was "simply the signifier of a solar-induced aridity and a resultant outward movement of the blood" ("On Saracen Enjoyment," 117). The sun, medieval Christians wrote, deprived Saracens of their own "spirites" through their pores, and, with them, their courage (Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment," 118). Thus, it is possible to read this consumption of animal blood by the Saracens on the eve of battle as a means of replenishing that blood – and valor – of which they are depleted by their otherness. The Saracens'

imbibing of blood, then, marks all the ways – cultural, religious, and biological – in which they are inextricably different from the Christians.

Later, on the eve of battle with the French knights, Laban and his followers once more consume blood, and the practice is once more associated with the frightening and alien otherness of the Saracens:

> All these people was gadred to Agremore,
> Thre hundred thousand of Sarsyns felle,
> Some blood, some yolowe, some blake as More,
> Some horible and stronge as devel of helle.
> He made hem drinke wilde beestes bloode,
> Of tigre, antelope and of camalyon,
> As is her use to egre her mode,
> When thai in were to battayle goon. (ll. 1003-1010)[32]

The consumption of blood, here specified as being that of tigers, antelopes, and, according to the MED, either chameleons or giraffes,[33] is in this scene presented as a fact equal in importance and shock value as that of the varying colors of the Saracens' skin. In particular, the possible reference to chameleon blood is interesting when it occurs so close to the depiction of the blue, yellow, and black skins of the men. The suggestion, of course, seems to be that their unusual – and, indeed, seemingly inhuman – coloring may be due, at least in part, to their consumption of the blood of exotic animals like chameleons, who can change

[32] Debra Best intriguingly notes that this Middle English version of the text "adds (this scene) to its source," and while she offers no additional commentary on this originality of the scene, I find it compelling, and wonder what the poet found to be so crucial about the scene (43).
[33] This rather puzzling confusion here, as to whether "camalyon" means, in this context, a chameleon or a giraffe, occurs, according to the MED, due to a variation in etymology of the word. The word comes from either "chamaeleon," a Greek borrowing in Latin, meaning chameleon, or "cameleo," a Medieval Latin word meaning "giraffe."

their color.[34] Once more, in contrast to the good Christians who shed their blood in battle, thereby cleansing themselves of sin and performing penance, the Saracens imbibe blood, a practice that, as opposed to purging, fills them with sin, animality, and otherness. The tiger, antelope, and chameleon bloods they drink "are matter which does not constitute human aliment and which therefore allies the Saracens with the anthropological unclean" (Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment," 129). The more animal blood they consume, the less human and decidedly less Christian they become.

In decided contrast to these sinful, imbibing Saracens, one of the poem's – and medieval literature's – most famous characters, Roland, expels blood, in a moment potent in its penitential symbolism. When Ferumbras arrives at the tent of Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers, he demands a combat with six of the famous Frankish knights, in a manner as courteous and chivalrous as any Christian characters the poem has seen so far. When Charlemagne summons Roland, his nephew and one of the romance tradition's most chivalric heroes, to answer Ferumbras' challenge, the younger man rudely refuses his king and uncle's command, proclaiming, "'Sir, have me excused!'" (l. 1084). Enraged by his nephew's insubordination, Charlemagne hits him across the face: "For that worde the Kinge was wrothe / And smote him on the mouthe on hye, / The bloode at his nose oute-goth…" (ll. 1091-1093). Charlemagne's violence towards Roland seems quite obviously centered on the question of vulnerability, particularly as it relates to chivalry. In refusing to enter chivalrous combat with Ferumbras, Roland has declined what would be the opportune moment to embrace appropriate vulnerability; therefore in response, Charlemagne hits him in a way that his nose (which, as a part of the face, naturally bleeds profusely when hit) instead becomes

[34] Likewise, if the term "camalyon" here means "giraffe," rather than "chameleon," the spottedness of the giraffe may impart similar connotations.

the site of his vulnerability. The startling image that the scene presents on the whole must have shocked contemporary readers: the Saracen in the room is the chivalrous, well-behaved one, and the Christians are flouting social code and drawing blood from each other. Roland's bleeding, perhaps, can then best be read as the appropriate punishment for his crime of upsetting social expectations.[35]

If his bloody nose serves an appropriately corrective purpose, it is not one that Roland appreciates immediately. Immediately after being hit, much like Gawain at the sight of his blood in the snow, Roland reacts violently defensively:

> "Abye," quod Roulande, "wole I noughte,
> And traitour was I never none,
> By that Lord, that me dere hath bought!"
> And braide oute Durendale there anone. (ll. 1095-1098)

Roland's shocking act of drawing his sword on Charlemagne spurs the other Frankish knights present to rush in between the two men. Although any further physical violence is prevented, and Roland eventually comes around to much more appropriate behavior, his bloody nose marks him throughout the rest of the romance as a character who, despite his Christianity, responds to the possibility of his own vulnerability by threatening violence. His shameful comportment, although immediately punished, continues to mark him as someone who needs correcting in order to maintain the status quo. Furthermore, it is notably Oliver – *not* Roland – who will later be considered worthy enough by the romance to defeat – and

[35] Emily Houlik-Ritchey writes of the poem that "[t]he Christians, indeed, outperform Saracen expectations in the extent of their violence," indeed often outperforming the extent of the Saracen violence as well (19). Ferumbras' arrival "when the Christians shock themselves with their own behavior" in this outburst between Charlemagne and Roland leaves Charlemagne nursing a "traumatic psychological wound," she argues (23, 30).

thereby convert – Ferumbras. Roland, quite clearly, is unworthy in the poet's estimation, and his nosebleed physically marks him as such.

Certainly, though, the character whose blood most confounds the status quo of the poem is Ferumbras. Like his sister Floripas, the Sultan's son is an epitome of the ideal Saracen convert. Even as a Saracen warrior, he displays honor on the battlefield, refusing to engage in combat when the Pope approaches him, recognizing the other's religious role, and beheading the traitor responsible for allowing the Saracens into Rome, scorning the crime of betrayal and denying the man the chance to betray the Saracens. As noted above, his chivalry in his visit to Charlemagne's tent to request combat is impeccable, and once he is granted that combat with Oliver, he remains well-spoken and -comported. Midway through their duel, impressed by Oliver's skill, Ferumbras offers him the chance to convert to Islam and become a duke, telling the other knight, "It were a pité the for to spille!" (l. 1226). Despite his desire to defeat him, Oliver is impressed (and very nearly bested) by Ferumbras, literally brought to his knees at one point by Ferumbras' stroke.

Such an equality between Oliver and Ferumbras is not allowed to last for long, however. As Cohen writes of a similar encounter in the *Grandes Chroniques* between Roland and Fernaguz, "When pagan and Christian subjectivities seem close enough almost to touch, violence erupts to redraw the faltering self/other boundary, this time in blood" ("On Saracen Enjoyment," 123). Ferumbras is finally defeated by Oliver, and it is here that the former's blood becomes an important part of the poem, although in a way that I contend brings the two men closer together, rather than sharply contrasted, as Cohen argues. The stroke that decides Oliver's victory is a mighty one, striking first on Ferumbras' shield, and moving down:

He raught a stroke to Ferumbras;

On his helme it gan down glyde.

It brast his hawberke at that ras

And carfe hym througheoute his syde.

His bare guttis men myght see;

The blode faste down ranne. (ll. 1347-1352, emphasis added).

The appearance of the side wound immediately calls to mind Christ, on whom Oliver calls just before delivering the blow, who "boght me with His hert blode" (l. 1346).[36] Christ's side wound, in particular, was praised among the other wounds sustained on the cross for its sheer vastness and openness – that is, its voluminous vulnerability. For example, to return to *TheBook of Holy Medicines,* Lancaster describes the side wound in the following manner: "And I am most certain that blood flowed in great abundance from that blessed side; for everyone can reasonably assume that more blood must have come from there because the wound was by far the largest, and it was also the deepest…" (234). Thus, for Ferumbras, a Saracen, to be made this visually similar to Christ is startling. Why is Ferumbras alone given this opportunity to be so markedly vulnerable, particularly in a way that grants him a genuinely intersubjective connection to Oliver?

Ferumbras' gory visual likeness to Christ continues. After admitting defeat and swearing his loyalty to Oliver, asking to convert to Christianity and become Oliver's man, Ferumbras lies under a tree, recovering from his battle, where Oliver temporarily leaves him. Coming upon the man he initially believes to be dead, Charlemagne finds him "walowynge

[36] Houlik-Ritchey notes that it is not only Oliver who calls upon God in this moment – the poem has just taken a brief change of scene in which Charlemagne has prayed for Ferumbras to be defeated, and Houlik-Ritchey argues that it is this prayer, not Oliver's, to which Ferumbras' defeat, and his sudden conversion, is an answer (43-44).

uppon the sonde / With blody woundes fyve" (ll. 1449-1450). The description of the battle that has come immediately before is certainly violent enough to support the assumption that Ferumbras sports at least five major wounds, if not more. The poem's specific attention here to exactly *five* wounds, including one that, as we saw above, is in his side, seems to deliberately recall Christ's five wounds on the cross: one in each hand and foot, and his side wound from Longinus' spear. The romance has created a visual metaphor in which Ferumbras, the Saracen, stands in for Christ. Once Charlemagne has witnessed these five Christ-like wounds, and heard Ferumbras' declaration that he is "To be baptised by Goddis grace, / And to dyen a Cristen knighte," his initial reaction of violent anger towards the man dissipates, and he welcomes Ferumbras into his camp (ll. 1461-1462). Because Ferumbras has, as it were, bled out his Saracen-ness and become like Christ, he is redeemed of his sinful background, and permitted entry into the Christian community. Indeed, Charlemagne most significantly signals his acceptance of Ferumbras by sending him his own personal surgeon to heal his wounds. This move on the part of the King to close up those wounds through which Ferumbras has opened himself to Christianity demonstrates an acknowledgment of his sacrifice and purgation, and an expression of satisfaction with the vulnerability that has been performed.

Ultimately, however, Charlemagne's acceptance of Ferumbras, and of his sister Floripas, also a convert, proves to be incomplete, and they are not permitted full entry into the Christian Frankish community. As the romance draws to a close, Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers depart to return to France, but not in their entirety. Left behind are Ferumbras and Sir Guy, just married to Floripas, and they are given the kingdom of Spayne to rule

together. The poem presents this gift of Charlemagne's as generous and a happy one for the recipients:

> Alle the londe of Spayne
> Kinge Charles gyfe hem two
> To departe bitwyxt hem twayne,
> Ferumbras and Gy also.
> And so thay livede in joye and game,
> And brethren both thay were.
> In pees and werre both i-same,
> There durste no man hem dere. (ll. 3196-3202)

However, despite the text's claims of the men's "joye and game" in their future, their exclusion from the party allowed to return to France is striking, especially for Sir Guy. Regardless of what penance Ferumbras' bleeding may have wrought, this ending suggests, he is still not able to be fully integrated into the Christian community. Similarly, Floripas, notwithstanding the myriad ways in which she has saved the lives of the Frankish soldiers throughout the story,[37] is so excluded that her marriage to Guy, a born and bred Christian Frank, has the effect of excluding him from the community as well. Although Ferumbras' body has been able to open itself to expel its Islam and allow Christianity to enter it, the social body of Charlemagne's court is unable to truly open itself to admit these converts. Additionally, the very notion that Guy and Ferumbras are to "departe" the kingdom of Spayne between them signifies Charlemagne's discomfort with including Ferumbras in his community: even in his gift to the men, he sows the seeds of strife and violent struggle.

[37] Including, of course, the magic girdle, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, that saves each knight from dying of starvation.

This final act shows how Charlemagne and the rest of the Christians are threatened by Ferumbras. As Cohen writes, "Crusade propaganda figured Islam as an unassimilable *body* exorbitantly marked by racial difference and threatening the corporate integrity of Latin Christendom" ("On Saracen Enjoyment," 119, emphasis original). The risk that Ferumbras serves to the bodily intactness of the Christian community, despite his conversion, is an insurmountable obstacle to his complete assimilation into the culture. In addition to perhaps harboring a fear that his conversion has not been complete, and that some taint of his Saracen Other-ness will ruin their Christian community, the Franks are threatened by how very well Ferumbras performs chivalry and vulnerability. As they – and the readers – have seen over and over again, his willingness to open himself bodily and spiritually outshines almost all of the Franks' performances of chivalry.[38] The Christians' refusal to fully incorporate Ferumbras into their community profoundly demonstrates their extreme lack of vulnerability. In an almost circular fashion, they cannot admit him into their community precisely because they are too invulnerable to admit him into their community.

Conclusion

Laura Ashe writes of chivalry, particularly in the 14th century, that, "In origin, it is an honour code by which the individual may risk and display himself to gain wealth and reputation, not one which attends to self-sacrifice, death, or any other effacement of the individual" (163). While the crux of her argument – "it is not possible to die for chivalry" – is a bit far afield from the argument of this chapter, I take as especially helpful this framing and definition of chivalry (ibid). Her description of chivalry as a code in which individuals

[38] Sir Guy, of course, in his (albeit somewhat reluctant) marriage to Floripas, also shows a degree of communal vulnerability and intersubjectivity – for which, we may note, he is also left behind by his king at the romance's close.

"risk [themselves]," but without any real threat of "effacement of the individual" encapsulates quite a bit of what I have explored in this chapter. That is, chivalry is a code that is deeply troubled on the topic of vulnerability. On the one hand, its ideology stipulates that its practitioners should always be vulnerable; on the other hand, many of its practices and applications prevent that vulnerability, and reject the narrative of it when it does take place. When Gawain bleeds onto the snow on New Year's Day, or when Ferumbras' wounds create a striking resemblance to Christ's, they are, in many ways, performing chivalry as it is theorized and idealized. However, in each of these instances, the chivalric community to which each man belongs – or strives to belong – shows how deeply uncomfortable it is with vulnerability in practice, and shuts him out. Blood, then, can be said to be the most potent and visible marker of the crisis of chivalry and vulnerability.

CHAPTER THREE – THE THREAT OF MATRIARCHAL POWER

The processes of pregnancy and breastfeeding are probably, within the framework of medieval medical knowledge, the instances of bleeding in which the intersubjectivity it affords is most clear. While it may seem like a strange idea to a modern audience to describe pregnancy and breastfeeding as instances of bleeding, medieval medical theory was quite clear on the topic: in a pregnant woman, her blood quite literally formed the fetus, and, after giving birth, her blood was "cooked" into breast milk.[39] According to *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, a 15th-century gynecological manuscript, "Women þat / be with schyld have no flovrys be-cause þe schylde ys noryschyde / in here body with þe same flovyrs" (ll. 114-116). Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, author of the *De Secretis Mulierum*, a late 13th-century treatise on reproduction, explains the process in the following way:

> When the fetus is in the uterus of the mother her breasts are hardened, because the womb closes and the menstrual substance flows to the breast. Then this substance is cooked to a white heat, and it is called the flower of woman; because it is white like milk it is also called the milk of woman. After being cooked in this way, it is sent through the vein to the womb, and there the fetus is nourished with its proper and natural food. (109)

In both processes of pregnancy and breastfeeding, one body not only opens to another, but literally forms another. The relationship between mother and child is an intensely intersubjective one, as the mother gives to the child in excruciatingly vulnerable ways: from the work of the body involved in pregnancy, to the extreme dangers involved in childbirth, to

[39] Medieval medical theory also understood semen to be a "cooked," or processed, form of blood: "When in man, digestion (especially in its third stage) of so much takes place that not everything is used to replace what has been lost and becomes restoration, the surplus is sent in the color of fine clear blood to the seminal receptacles or genitalia, where it is fermented and whitened by the power of the testicles" (Lemay, 146-147). Thus, medieval medical theory conceived of fetuses as being created out of the blood of both of their parents – in the form of the mother's menstrual or uterine blood and the father's blood-turned-semen.

the nourishment of breastfeeding. But the mother is not the only vulnerable one, not the only one open in this relationship: the infant, of course, is also extremely vulnerable, taking in as the mother gives, through first the umbilical cord and then the mouth at the breast. In addition to being a bleeding, vulnerable source, the mother is also a caregiver, listening to and learning to understand the non-verbal narratives of her infant's cries. The matriarchal process of creation is rich and nuanced, establishing a profoundly intimate and intersubjective relationship.

Patriarchal models of creation, however, are for more unidirectional, and lack the rich intersubjectivity that matriarchal models have. This model, in which the father-creator is a onetime giver of semen, has no intersubjectivity because it has no real vulnerability. Other than ejaculation, the father's body is not ever *open* to his child/creation in any way. This model of creation indeed often tries, particularly in literary representation, to be entirely asexual and invulnerable: Christ is the only parent of a figure, or the – always male – author is. While this model works on the page, it doesn't work in the physical world, because intersubjectivity, as it functions in the matriarchal model, is the only real biological way to create another human being. Therefore, the matriarchal model of creation, in its very intersubjectivity, is threatening to the patriarchal model; it serves as a constant reminder that, as much as the patriarchy would like to frame itself as completely capable of performing all creation on its own, both intersubjectivity and women's bodies are necessary for that creation to happen. The three texts explored in this chapter, in their presentation of women's bodies and processes of creation, particularly breastfeeding, show just how threatened the patriarchy is by matriarchal creative power. The containment and punishment of women's bodies, particularly at the site of nourishment (i.e. the breast), shows just how far patriarchy will go

to shut down matriarchal intersubjectivity so that the latter won't be as powerful. However, in its attempts to quash matriarchal modes of creation, the patriarchy only succeeds in demonstrating how much it needs the matriarchal, and the intersubjective.

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes that, "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). In other words, the breaching of boundaries – an act that is at the core of both vulnerability and intersubjectivity – is abject and threatening to some. The female body, of course, in its monthly boundary-crossings, has been, for centuries, considered the very pinnacle of this abjection. As Kristeva goes on to say:

> Neither tears nor sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value…Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference. (71)

Likewise, as Caroline Walker Bynum observes, "Such a notion (that the male body was paradigmatic) identified woman with breaches in boundaries, with lack of shape or definition, with openings and exudings and spillings forth" (*Fragmentation and Redemption*, 109). The female body was treated as abject because it crossed borders, and, in crossing those borders, was far more successful at creation than the male body. How threatening this success was for male writers in particular is highlighted by Kristeva's description, in "Stabat Mater," of breast milk: "both (milk and tears) are metaphors of non-language, of a 'semiotic' that does not coincide with linguistic communication" (143). That female bodies are thus capable of creating non-linguistic communication in addition to creating other bodies was

clearly especially threatening to male writers, as is evident in the texts explored in this chapter, as the stories repeatedly attempt to contain and/or punish women at the site of their creative and (re)productive capabilities.

Unless contained within an appropriate religious context, as in the case of St. Christina of Bolsena (in which case the power is represented as good, but still ultimately needing to be contained by a masculine power structure and set of rules), female nourishment is portrayed as violent and destructive in these texts. Sir Gowther's mother, rather than her son, is portrayed as responsible for his monstrosity and vileness, due to her desperate plea for pregnancy, and it is therefore the maternal influence against which and through which all punishment occurs throughout the story: the nine wet nurses nursed to death, the mother's nipple bitten off, and Gowther's later prohibition against eating anything other than that taken from the mouth of dogs. Canace's attempt to reproduce, because it defies her father so unsettlingly, is immediately and violently abbreviated, and the blood her child so horrifyingly rolls around in suggests that Canace's nourishment is inherently violent and wrong. The life of St. Christina of Bolsena, as portrayed by William Paris, is, in some ways, very like that of Constance, analyzed in Chapter Four, in that Christina, like Constance, is relentlessly beset by those who want to kill her. Christina, rather than being portrayed as a monster for surviving all the attempts on her life, is a saint – specifically because of Christ's active role in her repeated survival, as well as the Christ-like nature of much of her bleeding and wounding. Only because her bleeding fits into the Christian and Christ-like narrative and structure is Christina spared the portrayals Gowther's mother and Canace receive – but even Christina, when finally penetrated by arrows must succumb to masculine rules and power structures, and die.

Sir Gowther and the Punishment of Nourishment

Sir Gowther, a Middle English Breton lay found in two late fifteenth-century manuscripts, tells the story of what is known by folklore scholars as a Wish Child, born as the result of a woman making a wish for a child "while alone in an orchard or wooded area at a certain time of day. There she meets a stranger, a supernatural being in disguise, who becomes the agent of her pregnancy" (Laskaya and Salisbury, 265). While some portrayals of this Wish Child motif end well, paralleling the stories of St. Anne and the Annunciation, *Sir Gowther* takes the opposite turn, as the supernatural figure who comes to Gowther's mother and fathers Gowther is no less than the demon most well-known for fathering Merlin. Gowther's conception is the result of his mother's indiscriminate wish, for which she, and, in her stead, a series of nine wet nurses, is soundly punished.

Too long (more than ten years) barren, Gowther's mother, married to the Duke of Estryke, is threatened by her husband with divorce for failing to produce an heir to the kingdom. In desperation, her pleas for a child begin in a holy and appropriate manner, but the indiscriminateness of her prayer is costly: "Scho preyd to God and Maré mylde / Schuld gyffe hur grace to have a child, / On what maner scho ne roghth" (ll. 64-66). Although her prayer is made to God and Mary, because of her failure to care about the specifics of the "maner" of her pregnancy, she soon finds herself approached in her orchard by a man who, although he looks "As lyke hur lorde as he might be," reveals himself after their tryst to be a "felturd fende," who has just fathered her child (ll. 70, 74). Rather than immediately confessing or somehow attempting to atone for her devilish encounter, the duchess runs back to her husband, assuring him that she has been visited by an angel promising the conception of a son that night, and rushes him into bed. Therefore, the Duke has no reason to believe that

Gowther is not his own (divinely announced) son and heir. As Michael Uebel astutely notes, "The orchard setting is an obvious clue to the sexual peril that eventuates because of the Lady's misdirected wish. An enchanted landscape in which the beauty of nature is enhanced by human artifice, the orchard is especially suited for the uncontrolled production of fantasy since it is here that every element is designed to appeal sensually" (97). In addition to the exaggerated, sensual artifice of the orchard, the location of Gowther's mother's mistake also, of course, suggests the Garden of Eden, the location of woman's first sin. Not only is Gowther's mother guilty of opening herself to sin in a way distinctly similar to Eve, she is guilty of reproducing in a manner that has denied her husband, the rightful patriarch of her family and his kingdom, any influence or power. Her anti-patriarchal act of copulation is swiftly punished, as Gowther the infant begins to enact horrific violence on the motherly and nourishing influences around him.

Unsurprisingly for a child of nobility in the period, the infant Gowther is given to a wet nurse to be breastfed, rather than his own mother. Denied the opportunity to slake his inhuman appetite and enact punishment on the sinner – his mother – herself, Gowther's first violence is against the wet nurse – and, as it turns out, her eight successors:

Tho Duke comford that Duches heynde,
And aftur melche wemen he sende,
    Tho best in that cuntré,
That was full gud knyghttys wyffys.
He sowkyd hom so thei lost ther lyvys,
    Sone had he sleyne three!
Tho chyld was yong and fast he wex –

The Duke gard prycke aftur sex –

Hende harkons yee:

Be twelfe monthys was gon

Nine norsus had he slon

Of ladys feyr and fre. (ll. 109-120)

A great deal is remarkable about this account of the first year of Gowther's life. Most obvious, of course, is the sheer enormity and monstrosity of the infant's appetite. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, to suck one wet nurse to death may be regarded as an – albeit unusual and startling – misfortune, but to suck nine wet nurses dry looks like, if not carelessness, a definite sign of inhuman appetite and desire. Indeed, the very identity of the wet nurses Gowther is killing is also surprising, and serves to underscore the vastness of his hunger: while the use of wet nurses by wealthy and elite parents was fairly standard in the era, the women employed thus were typically poorer than the mothers they worked for, and of a relatively low social status (Spar, 291). Therefore, the fact that Gowther's parents employ "full good knyghttys wyffys" as their son's wet nurses is noticeably unusual (l. 112). For one thing, it reinforces the status of Gowther's mother and, more importantly, his unknowingly-step-father. Moreover, this explicit description of the wet nurses as being of a relatively high social status makes the fate Gowther inflicts upon them that much more severe, and his appetite that much more voracious. For the young Gowther's appetite to have the power to drain not peasant wet nurses, but wet nurses of the low gentry, to death, demonstrates just how destructively voracious he is. As Dana Oswald observes regarding Gowther's rather high-class tastes in wet nurses, "His actions deplete the community of noble wives and mothers" (167-168). Not only does his monstrous hunger drain those women of

their life blood in the form of breast milk, it drains the dukedom's society of its maternal members.[40]

Unsurprisingly, the community eventually decides that it has had enough of losing its wives, mothers, and maternal resources in this manner, and stops the flow of life, milk, and blood to Gowther and the duke: "Knyghtus of that cuntré geydyrd hom samun / And seyd to tho Duke hit was no gamun / To lose hor wyffus soo" (ll. 121-123). The knights refuse to allow the duke to hire any more of their wives as wet nurses for Gowther, and so his mother, at last, is forced to nurse him herself. While Gowther's voracity does not extend to draining his mother dry and dead, it expresses itself in another sort of violence: "Upon a day bad hym tho pappe, / He snaffulld to hit soo / He rofe tho hed fro tho brest" (ll. 128-130). Although his mother's torn nipple is quickly healed by the duke's physicians, this incident emphatically marks the end of Gowther's nursing, and he is immediately weaned and begins to be fed "rych fode" (l. 136). Oswald repeatedly emphasizes that both of these early acts of violence – the draining of his nine wet nurses, and the ripping of his mother's nipple – are not purposeful acts of malevolence. She writes that "these behaviors come from instinct, not malicious desire;" that Gowther possesses "a desire that is instinctual, not intentional;" and that "The poet ascribes no will in Gowther to harm his mother" (167-168). Oswald's point is valid and well-taken, to be sure: the deaths of the wet nurses and the injury to Gowther's mother are not, indeed, the results of Gowther's innate desire for violence – that desire will reveal itself later, when he begins to rape nuns and torch convents. Instead, these early deeds reflect the inhuman hunger bestowed upon Gowther by his demonic parentage.

[40] Uebel aptly describes the infant Gowther as "vampirically draining" his nurses (100). Unfortunately, Oswald's dismissal of this characterization misunderstands medieval medical theory regarding breast milk as a processed form of blood: "Uebel argues for a different kind of monstrosity for Gowther, when he claims that Gowther 'vampirically' sucks nursemaids dry (100). While Gowther does seem to be sucking the life-force from these women, he certainly does not consume their blood" (167 ff.14).

However, while Oswald's focus in this analysis is on defining Gowther's motivation, I am more interested in the targets of these violent deeds done in infancy, and the significance of those targets. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that "The physical violence that attends every attempt at nurture demonstrates that no place exists for him (Gowther) within the domestic spaces represented by the parade of nurses and his mother; Gowther, from infancy, resists familialism" ("Gowther Among the Dogs," 225). Likewise, Tania Colwell observes of both these early acts as well as his later violence towards nuns, that "The mistreatment of his maternal and spiritual nurturers is indicative of Gowther's unnatural position in the chivalrous social world" (147). While both of these authors still focus on Gowther himself, in their descriptions they move towards the argument I make: that is, that the violence the young Gowther expresses is entirely targeted at those who offer him nourishment. Not only that, but Gowther's destructiveness is aimed specifically at the means of nourishment. In draining nine wet nurses to death and rooting so hard around his mother's nipple that he tears it off, baby Gowther directs all of his inhuman ferocity as directly as possible at the fluid and location of nurture itself. Both Cohen and Colwell discuss what this means for Gowther – that he is excluded from both the familial and the chivalrous communities – but I, instead, think about what this means for Gowther's mother. Therefore, I find less helpful for my purposes engaging too deeply in debates about the question of Gowther's maliciousness or savage innocence – for the sake for my argument, why Gowther does what he does to his mother and wet nurses is far less important than the fact that, through his actions, his mother – both directly and via the wet nurses – receives punishment.

As emphasized above, the tale makes it quite clear that the blame for Gowther's monstrosity belongs to his mother. Her indiscriminate plea for pregnancy brings upon her the

incubus who fathers the child, and her immediate subsequent lie to her husband about the child's paternity sets in motion the raising of the half-demon Gowther. Thus, it seems clear that the targeting of the infant Gowther's violence towards the providers and the very means of nourishment is an explicit punishment of the maternal within the realm of this particular romance. Although the draining of the wet nurses may not be explicitly targeted at Gowther's mother herself, it is an attack on his earliest mother figures, and seems to extend the punishment (and blame) from Gowther's mother outwards towards maternity and nurture as a whole. Uebel asserts that, "Considered together, Gowther's preoedipal crimes represent a sadistic rebellion against the maternal, the earliest indication of his urge toward annihilation. Gowther makes a preternaturally early break from his mother (and her substitutes), attacking them at the very site of their life-sustaining power" (101). While Uebel's emphasis is, once more, on the nature of Gowther and his actions, his description of the victims of these actions is especially apt and complementary to my argument.

As they were (mis)understood in the Middle Ages, both menstruation and breastfeeding were seen as threatening and confusing to male writers in the period. Both processes, but menstruation in particular, are regular processes by which women lose fluids – in particular blood, since, as we have seen, breast milk was considered to be a more processed form of blood – without showing any indication of illness or harm. While a man bleeding out on the battlefield will likely die of blood loss, a menstruating or nursing woman seems, to the distressed medieval man, no worse for her own depletion. As Angela Florschuetz writes, "The nursing mother provides a potential instance of monstrosity, as, in a parallel to women's ability through menstruation to bleed without wound, the nurse's body provides sustenance without being deformed through consumption" (43). This apparent

invincibilityon the part of women was threatening to men, as it suggested that women were significantly stronger than them, and/or that they were somehow inhuman, monstrously unaffected by blood loss. Thus, it seems particularly appropriate that the punishment directed at the figures of maternity and nourishment in this romance is for that seeming imperviousness to end: that is, for nine women to literally die of having breastfed too much, and then for Gowther's mother's nipple, the source of breast milk, to be torn off, rendering her incapable of continuing to nurse her son.[41] It is unsettling to men that women can nurse and menstruate and not be ill-affected, and a woman is clearly to blame in this situation; so, according to the logic of this tale, women in general should be punished by losing their ability to give fluids to their children without any injury or depletion.

As the romance goes on, nourishment continues to be the site of punishment, although the direction of that punishment changes. While the first penalty is levied against Gowther's mother and her avatars in nurturing, the nine wet nurses, this latter sanction is against Gowther himself, yet it still has as its central focus the interpersonal act of nourishment. Although Gowther's infantile acts of violence could be considered to be (inhumanly) instinctual, rather than malicious, Gowther's deeds as a young man are filled with nothing but malice. Taking the place of his adopted father as Duke, after the older man has died of sorrow, Gowther turns his demonic nature primarily against the church, refusing to attend services, and culminating in a vicious attack against a convent:

[41] Somewhat perplexing is the fact that, unlike the wet nurses, Gowther's mother does not die, but suffers an injury at the site of nourishment instead. After all, if the romance, as I argue, is so fundamentally concerned with punishing her in particular, why should she alone of the women who tend him survive her son's infancy? While several possible explanations suggest themselves, one is most compelling to me. The explanation that I suspect best justifies her survival is that she must live until her repentant son can marry her to the earl who is the first to speak out against Gowther. In her marriage to the earl, she is reinstated – by her son, no less – into the patriarchal system she defied by copulating with the incubus to produce Gowther. If she were to die in his infancy, the romance would not be able to re-restrain her into the patriarchy so firmly.

He went to honte apon a day,

He see a nonry be tho way

And thedur con he ryde;

Tho pryorys and hur covent

With presescion ageyn hym went

Full hastely that tyde;

Thei wer full ferd of his body,

For he and is men bothe leyn hom by –

Tho sothe why schuld y hyde?

And sythyn he spard hom in hor kyrke

And brend hom up, thus con he werke;

Then went his name full wyde. (ll. 181-192)

Several scholars, including Florscheutz, Colwell, and Oswald, have aptly observed that this raping and burning of the nuns is a continuation of his earlier attacks on his wet nurses and mother, as the nuns symbolically represent Mother Church, and his assault on them an extension of his violence towards maternal figures. Florscheutz writes that "the attacks on women continue the attacks at the breasts of his nurses and mother," and also that the attacks on the nuns and other clergy specifically "suggests a literalization of church members as the body of Christ, as well as an attack on *Mater Ecclesia* herself" (54). While my own analysis is less concerned with the spiritual nurturing attacked here, the fact that women remain the primary target of Gowther's violence emphasizes the extent to which nourishment, and particularly the maternal figures who distribute it, is the fraught center of the romance.

Nourishment remains that focus of the poem as Gowther faces his own punishment, as his primary censure is food-related, and is a bizarre form of fast. Shortly after his attack on the nunnery, Gowther's demonic paternity is revealed to him. Stricken by the revelation, Gowther is immediately contrite. He places the earl who was bold enough to speak out against him in his place, and departs for Rome to receive penance and absolution from the Pope. Although this sudden shift from unrepentant evil to contrition might seem to be a large enough change, the greatest, and oddest, alteration to his behavior is yet to come, at the demand of the Pope himself.[42]

The penance proposed by the Pope, ultimately taken up by Gowther, re-orients the focus of the tale from Gowther's violent deeds to his fraught relationship with nourishment, and imposes upon him a strange fast indeed:

> "'Wherser thu travellys, be northe or soth,
> Thu yet no meyt bot that thu revus of howndus mothe
> Cum thy body within;
> Ne no worde speke for evyll ne gud,
> Or thu reyde tokyn have fro God,
> That forgyfyn is thi syn.'" (ll. 295-300)

This unusual sentence, that Gowther can eat only food that he has taken from the mouth of a dog, enacts upon him a punishment through the very act of nourishment and feeding. Uebel reads this penalty as a specifically targeted retribution for Gowther's earliest acts of violence: "Remarkably, the pope attempts to turn the sadistic Gowther into a masochistic knight by

[42] I would even go so far as to suggest that this bizarrely sudden change of heart on Gowther's part gives the lie to the idea that the romance is primarily concerned with Gowther's spiritual evolution, and that his transformation from violent half-demon to peaceful, respected male leader serves instead as a background for an emphasis on punishing women and all sites and forms of nourishment for the crime of defying patriarchal modes of creation and reproduction.

compelling him to focus his identity on one part of his body, his mouth, transforming the site of his original sins (the oral attacks on his nurses and his mother) into a sign of penance" (105). I would suggest rather that the more important linking factor between this punishment and Gowther's infantile crimes is not specifically his mouth, but the act and substance of nourishment. That is to say, I contend that the romance is more concerned with punishing the entire intersubjective process of nourishment, not just the one side of it that Gowther's mouth represents. As Gowther's mother's crime was punished in the beginning of the story, through the violence done both to the nine wet nurses and to her own breast, Gowther himself now must endure penance, and both penalties are inflicted at the site of nurture and feeding. Common to both of these punishments is that it seems that the very interpersonal act of nurture, rather than Gowther or his mother, is the true object of the penalty. Whether this discipline takes the form of depriving breastfeeding – the originary, most instinctual form of nourishment – of its unique ability to feed without diminishment of resources, or the form of restricting a grown man, holding the titled position of Duke, to eating only that which he takes from the mouths of dogs, it is abundantly clear that this romance obsessively punishes the act of nourishment.

As discussed above, this drive on the part of the poem to focus its disciplinary energy against the act of nourishment seems to stem primarily from male anxieties about the female power that is demonstrated by the acts of menstruation and breastfeeding. Peggy McCracken writes, "women's bleeding bodies may be viewed as profoundly threatening to the symbolic status of bloody heroism: the body that can regularly bleed but not die challenges the heroic nexus of blood, death, and glory promoted in romance narratives about battles undertaken to restore justice, win women, and gain honor" (13). Likewise, the body that can feed another

living being but not be depleted troubles medieval ideas surrounding the Eucharist, cannibalism, and bodily integrity.[43] All of which is to say that the fertile, reproductive female body is, in some crucial ways, substantially more powerful than the male body, and texts like *Sir Gowther* provide examples of the ways in which medieval male writers reacted to their anxieties about this power differential. Mary Douglas writes, of sexual pollution taboos, that "Both male and female physiology lend themselves to the analogy with the vessel which must not pour away or dilute its vital fluids. Females are correctly seen as, literally, the entry by which the pure content may be adulterated. Males are treated as pores through which the precious stuff may ooze out and be lost, the whole system being thereby enfeebled" (156). The fact that the system is somehow *not* enfeebled, to use Douglas' phrasing, by menstruation and nursing, explains both the derision and scorn with which menstrual blood and breast milk have long been treated, as well as demonstrating the greater amounts of strength and endurance possessed by women. In this instance, Gowther's mother moves beyond the usual capacities of the reproductive female body, and over-reaches her bounds by indiscriminately praying for pregnancy and then copulating with a demon. For this over-stepping on her part, female power – in the form of breastfeeding and nourishment – is targeted and repeatedly punished. Likewise, it is only when Gowther fully conscribes himself within the patrarchal power structure of both the Catholic Church (in his strict adherence to the penance given to him by the Pope), and the Holy Roman Empire (in his military defense

[43] For a compelling argument about the interwoven concepts of the Eucharist and cannibalism throughout *Sir Gowther*, see Florschuetz, 44-50. For scholarship on Gowther and food in general, especially in relation to cannibalism, see Anna Chen, "Consuming Childhood: *Sir Gowther* and National Library of Scotland MS Advocates 19.3.1," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 111.3, 2012, pp. 360-383; Jane Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*," in *Medieval Women – Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al, Brepols, 2000, pp. 329-344; and E.M. Bradstock, "*Sir Gowther*: Secular Hagiography or Hagiographical Romance or Neither?" *AUMLA*, 59.1, 1983, pp. 26-47, among others.

of the Emperor), and accepts nourishment only from a virginal, submissive female through the mediation prescribed by the Pope, that he is absolved of his crimes and the romance reaches a more or less happy ending.

Immediately after receiving his penance from the Pope, Gowther faithfully begins it, saying not a word and finding a spot under a hill where he conveniently – indeed, one might instead describe it as miraculously – is brought food by a greyhound every day for three days. Uebel notes that this convenience severely undercuts, or perhaps even negates, the severity of his penance, "for what was to be a difficult task – wrestling with a dog for its bones – has become effortless, as easy as receiving the bread of the Eucharist during Mass" (106). Uebel goes on to posit that it is possibly exactly this passivity Gowther needs to exhibit here that is the purpose of his penance; I, however, think that the romance emphasizes a different detail of Gowther's sustenance for these three days. "Tho grwhownd ylke a dey / A whyte lofe he hym broghht," the poem tells us, and, though the detail is small, it is of note that this greyhound is male (ll. 314-315).[44] That is to say, Gowther's first act of Church-sanctioned consumption is provided to him by a masculine creature, rather than the female nurturers who sustained him in his infancy and suffered his violence. Indeed, not only is the greyhound male, but the permission Gowther has received to take this nourishment from the greyhound also comes from a male nurturer in the form of the Pope, acting as the earthly emissary of Christ. For nourishment to be legitimate and safe from the penalties enacted so harshly against Gowther's mother and wet nurses in the beginning of the romance, it must both come from and be officially approved by a masculine source, the romance asserts. This

[44] While the use of the pronoun "he" used to refer to a female subject is certainly attested in Middle English, this poem uses it almost exclusively to refer to male subjects, preferring the pronoun "sche" to refer to female subjects (*Middle English Dictionary*, "hē (pron.(2))"). Thus, while there is the slight possibility that the greyhound is here referred to as female, the overwhelming evidence of pronoun use in the entirety of the romance strongly supports my claim to the contrary.

masculine source, we note, is almost as far from intersubjectivity as possible. By restricting Gowther to muteness and eating only from dog's mouths, the Pope has effectively shut off all of Gowther's intimate access to other human beings.

This remains the case even when, after this particular greyhound disappears, Gowther makes a new home for himself under the table of the Emperor. Quickly assuming that this strange man who refuses to speak or eat anything other than what he pulls from the mouths of the dogs is probably performing some act of penance, the astute Emperor makes sure to over-feed the dogs, ensuring that Gowther will have enough to eat, and provides Gowther with a small private room, fondly referring to him as Hob the Fool. The Emperor's daughter, also mute, is the object of a Sultan's lust, against whose assault on the Emperor when he is denied her hand in marriage Gowther must defend. After Gowther's first battle against the Sultan, performed in disguise, he returns to the Emperor's court, taking up again his place under the table with the dogs. The Emperor's daughter, sensitive to what she has observed about the man's eating habits, sees to it that he is as genteelly provided for as possible, given his restrictions:

> Tho meydon toke too gruhowndus fyn
> And waschyd hor mowthus cleyn with wyn
> And putte a lofe in tho ton;
> And in tho todur flesch full gud;
> He raft bothe owt with eyggur mode,
> That doghty of body and bon. (ll. 445-450)

Although this act of kindness on the princess' behalf might initially seem to be a contradiction of the argument that the romance only endorses acts of nourishment when they

are performed by male nurturers, this instead ought to be read as an act of nourishment mediated by the greyhounds. While the greyhounds here are not gendered at all, they continue to represent the edict imposed on Gowther by the (male) Pope, acting as the emissary of Christ (also male). Additionally, although the Emperor's daughter is certainly female, she is demonstrably unlike many of the women who suffered at the hands – or, rather, mouth – of the infant Gowther, in that she is a chaste virgin and, even more uniquely, mute. In her muteness, the Emperor's daughter not only mirrors Gowther's own penance, but she also is dramatically symbolically closed. This muteness, and its attendant symbolism of closure, marks her as very different from Gowther's mother and wet nurses, who, as mothers, were clearly not chaste. (And, in the case of Gowther's mother, unfaithful.) She is even marked as different from the nuns the young Gowther so horrifically terrorizes, as they, although assumedly chaste, are never described as mute. This extreme closure of the Emperor's daughter marks her as atypical amongst the romance's female characters, suggesting that her presentation to Gowther of bread and meat in the wine-cleansed mouths of the greyhounds should be read as something very unlike the nourishment he receives from his wet nurses and mother. The romance still cannot allow typical maternal nourishment to be seen as a positive, unpunished deed.

When the Emperor's daughter finally does speak, her speech is both provoked and inspired by male figures: moved by Gowther's taking of a spear to the shoulder in his final defense of her father against the Sultan, the princess swoons and falls from her tower, lying in a silent coma for two days. When her father brings the Pope to preside at her funeral, she surprises everyone by suddenly rising and speaking to Gowther:

Ho seyd, "My lord of heyvon gretys the well,

And forgyffeus the thi syn yche a dell,

And grantys the tho blys;

And byddus the speyke on hardely,

Eyte and drynke and make mery;

Thu schallt be won of His." (ll. 661-666)

From the fact that it is Gowther's (anonymous) rescue of her father that makes her moan and swoon, to the fact that her first words are not truly hers, but God's words placed in her mouth, it is evident that the Emperor's daughter, as much as she seems to be a positive portrayal of femininity in the romance, is simply a medium through which male power and grace can be given to Gowther. This refusal to acknowledge female power as positive continues as the Pope then turns to Gowther, telling him that this is the sign from God ending his penance promised earlier, and that he has even more reason to celebrate: "[The Pope] seyd, 'Now art thu Goddus chyld; / The thar not dowt tho warlocke wyld, / Ther waryd mot he bee'" (ll. 673-675). Although the Pope claims that this is news of Gowther's new paternity, the claim that Gowther is now "Goddus chyld" seems to erase his former maternity as well, leaving God as Gowther's only parent, with neither his incubus father nor his sinful human mother responsible for him at all. As Florschuetz writes, "Gowther essentially rewrites family and lineal history so that he issues neither from his father or his mother, but only from God" (62). While the erasure of his demonic paternity is entirely understandable, the simultaneous erasure of his maternity seems more aligned with the gendered politics of the poem. Once more, female or maternal power is denied any positive acknowledgement. Instead, the ultimate patriarchal productive model is put into place, giving Gowther only one, divine parent, with whom he shares no vulnerability.

As is fairly predictable in the romance genre, Gowther marries the Emperor's daughter, and becomes heir to the Holy Roman Empire. He returns home to Estryke, where he marries the Earl he left in charge in his absence to his mother, and makes the older man the official ruler of the dukedom, surrendering his own claim to the territory. When he comes back to Germany, he finds his father-in-law dead, and takes the throne as Emperor. The romance tells us that he rules "mony a yere" well, and after his death, his shrine becomes the site of miracles, where blind men come to see, mute men to speak, and crippled men to walk (l. 721). As several scholars have pointed out, one important thing is absent from this otherwise happy ending: any heirs. The Emperor's daughter is not mentioned at all in the 75 lines between their marriage and the romance's conclusion, and there is no mention made of her and Gowther's production of an heir to the imperial throne. Oswald writes that this conspicuous absence in the conclusion of the tale is due to anxiety about Gowther's monstrosity, and what sort of children it might produce: "The poet resolves this dilemma (that is, the possibility that Gowther might father monstrous children) by removing Gowther from reproductive circulation, redeeming him, but not quite trusting the stability of his body" (194). Similarly, Florschuetz writes that, "The solution the romance offers to this conundrum (the dangers of feeding and nourishment) is to abandon biological reproduction altogether" (63). In depriving Gowther – and his wife, the Emperor's daughter – of any biological children, the romance demonstrates one final rejection of the matriarchal model of reproduction. By allowing Gowther to have symbolic, posthumous, spiritual children in the form of the ill and disabled who visit his shrine, the romance asserts one last time that only that productive power that is completely free of female or maternal influence can be

acknowledged as a good or beneficial thing. The nourishment that the female body can give, the romance affirms, is abject, and to be punished rather than celebrated.

Canace's Blood on the Floor

In Book Three of the *Confessio Amantis*, the book focused on teaching Amans the dangers of wrath, Genius tells his student the tale of Canace and Machaire. As the two siblings grow up in the same chamber, living and growing – it seems – with no other interactions, Machaire – inevitably, according to Genius – falls in love with his sister. While it may seem that this tale would be more fit for Book Eight, Genius' diatribe to Amans against the sin of incest, this story appears where it does because the focus – and, indeed, much of the blame in the telling of the story – is placed on Canace and Machaire's father, for his wrathful response to learning of his children's crime. Rather than concluding the tale with a condemnation of the incestuous siblings, Genius tells Amans that Eolus, their father, "for al that he was to wyte" (l. 334). My contention is that the focus of Eolus' horrific wrath is not – or, at least, not simply – the incest committed by his children, but the initiative and ownership of her own reproductive, nourishing powers that Canace attempts to take. In the tale's emphasis on blood, both in Canace's plea to her father for mercy and in the gruesome, yet fascinating scene of her death, Eolus' anger is shown to be primarily concerned with controlling his daughter's nourishing and reproductive capacities. María Bullón-Fernández' argument is that the tale is primarily about Eolus' wrath that Canace "ignores his authority in the private sphere, showing her independence from him," and exerting power over her own body (l58). Bullón-Fernández asserts that this obsession with authority over his daughter's body on Eolus' part acts as a representation in miniature of his abuse of authority as a king. My own argument dovetails with Bullón-Fernández' in its focus on Eolus' inappropriate

desire to maintain authority over his daughter's (and son's) body; but while her argument is interested in the political, my own is especially attuned to the domestically physical, in particular the fact that it is not simply Canace's body that Eolus denies her autonomy over, but her reproductive capacity in particular.

Strikingly, no explanation is ever given by Genius as to why Eolus decides to confine his two children to isolation together, but their unusual upbringing is described in some detail, as logical prelude to their incest:

> Be daie bothe and ek be nyhte,
> Whil the be yonge, of comun wone
> In chamber thei togedre wone,
> And as thei scholden pleide hem ofte,
> Til thei be growen up alofte
> Into the youthe of lusti age,
> Whan kinde assaileth the corage
> With love and doth him for to bowe,
> That he no reson can allowe,
> Bot halt the lawes of nature. (ll. 148-157)

"Wone," used both as a noun in line 149 and a verb in line 150, reflects the truly confined nature of Canace and Machaire's childhood experience. Although the noun can simply designate "A building or structure for human residence, a house, dwelling, an abode," it can also signify the slightly more restricted "room or chamber in a house," or be as explicitly constricted as "A place of confinement, prison, dungeon" (*Middle English Dictionary,*

"wōn(e (n.(2))," definitions 1a, 1b, and 2a).[45] With no additional context or explanation given, there is no reason *not* to read Canace and Machaire's dwelling as a prison, especially since it is clear that, for whatever reason, Eolus denies them interaction with other human beings. Eolus' imprisonment and isolation of his children in their "wone" appears to have the intended effect of infantilizing them. As Bullón-Fernández points out, "The 'chambre' represents the private family space separated from the outside, from public interaction, which Canace can never leave" (166). By denying them the adult privileges of interacting with the larger, public sphere, Eolus keeps his children in a permanent inferior, child-like position. Furthermore, the restriction of Canace and Machaire to a relatively small space together is almost suggestive of the two siblings being contained in a womb (a word phonologically similar to "wone"), perpetually products of the process of copulation and reproduction, rather than the agents or performers of it.

To Eolus' dismay, his children refuse to be contained in this state of perpetual childhood, and soon enough, subject to the assaults of "kinde," or nature, fall in love with each other and become agents, rather than products, of the process of reproduction (l. 154).[46] Rather than remaining the passive objects of Eolus' patriarchal creation of them, Canace and Machaire take active part in the deeply intersubjective experiences of love and sex. The two siblings seem to be unaware of the prohibitions against incest, "til thei falle nothing dredeth," and their father can only be to blame for this ignorance (l. 180). As Bullón-Fernández points

[45] Although the verb "wŏnen," according to the MED, has no similar sense of imprisonment, it is interesting, given the context of the tale, to note that, in addition to its more typical meaning of "To live (somewhere), reside, dwell," it can also specifically mean, when used with the preposition "togedre," as it is here, "share a dwelling (with a mate)" (definitions 1a and 1d).

[46] In the TEAMS edition of the text, Russell A. Peck glosses the line "When kinde assaileth the corage" as "When nature attacks the heart" (l. 154, p. 154). While this is absolutely an apt glossing of the line, I feel it does a great disservice to the discussion of incest in the tale not to also acknowledge "kinde" as having the potential meaning of "kindred, kinsfolk," or the intricacies of the question of whether incest is the paragon of, or the absolute opposition to, nature (MED, "kīnde (n.)," def. 10c).

out, for Canace to feel shame at her union with her brother, she would need to be aware of social taboos, for which she would need to have been exposed to the "existence of two spheres (the public and the private)," which, kept in her father's private sphere, she has not (166). Because of her extremely restrictive upbringing, Canace feels no shame at having committed incest with her brother, but only feels concern when "the wombe aros," lest her father know that she has acted with agency and autonomy over her own body (l. 190). Both Canace and Machaire are afraid that Eolus will learn that they have been sexual at all, but the fact of that sexual activity having been with each other does not seem to be their primary concern. Indeed, even Eolus, in his rage once he has discovered Canace's pregnancy and child, appears to be far angrier that his daughter has used her own reproductive capacity without his permission than that it has been with her brother. Bullón-Fernández aptly describes his anger as stemming "from his realization that he has lost absolute control over his daughter's body" (164). Bullón-Fernández' analysis of this anger emphasizes the commentary that this offers on the dangers of absolutist monarchy. I am interested in exploring what this desire for absolute control – specifically over his daughter's body, rather than his son's – says about Eolus and his anxiety about female reproductive powers.[47] How, in other words, do Eolus' tyrannically patriarchal tendencies reveal themselves in relation to his private sphere as well as to his kingdom?

[47] A.C. Spearing, Bullón-Fernández, and Diane Watt also contend that there may indeed be an incestuous element to Eolus' extreme fixation with Canace's sexual and reproductive life. Watt writes that "he seems to be implicated in the sin of his children: the 'melancholy' that lies behind his wrath implies some sort of love-longing" (199). Likewise, Spearing observes of the scene in which Eolus sends a knight with a sword to Canace for her to kill herself that, "It is as though Eolus is proposing incest at a double remove, substituting the knight for himself and the sword for the phallus" (217). While this argument is certainly compelling, this chapter is primarily focused on the fact of women's reproductive and nourishing capacities. For a discussion of excessively contained family lines, see Chapter Four, in its analysis of the Constance story.

In a moment that is startling in the extremely casual way the poem announces it, shortly before Canace gives birth, Machaire, worried about his father's reaction to him having "forlein" his sister, simply leaves: "Machaire goth, Canace abit" (ll. 198, 201). Machaire's sudden departure is remarkable for a few reasons. One is that his primary concern is that "men wolde sein / That he his soster hath forlein" (ll. 197-198). Peck glosses "forlein" as "robbed of virginity," and both the MED and the OED are more or less in agreement that, when the verb is used with a man as the subject, it typically refers to either illicit or somehow nonconsensual sexual relations (155).[48] Machaire, unlike his sister, appears to be aware that there is something illicit about their union, but Peck's gloss, as well as the other shades of meaning of the word "forlein," suggests that what he deems taboo about their sexual relationship is not their status as siblings, but the fact that, in taking his sister's virginity, he has somehow taken something that does not belong to him, but belongs, instead, to his father. As his daughter, Canace – and, crucially, both her virginity and her ability to reproduce – should belong to Eolus, and be his to distribute to a potential son-in-law as he sees fit. While this role would typically pass to her brother if Eolus were dead, he is not. As Bullón-Fernández points out, this premature controlling move on Machaire's part is quite probably threatening to Eolus because it suggests the possibility of his son attempting to take over his father's role prematurely in other arenas as well, particularly that of kingship: "the person who has taken his place is his own son, that is, the person who is going to replace him, but who is not supposed to do so yet" (167). As Machaire's flight shows, the primary point of

[48] MED, "forlīen (v.)," def. 1a, "To have illicit sexual relations with (someone), to lie with, seduce (a woman); to be unchaste, commit adultery…" def. 1b, "to rape (a woman); OED, "forlie, v.," def. 3, "*trans.* Of the man: To lie with, violate."

strife between him and his father surrounds the control of Canace's reproductive faculties, rather than Machaire's own.

That Canace and her reproductive potential are the crucial things Eolus is most concerned with controlling is also evident from the other remarkable fact about Machaire's sudden, two-word departure, from both his father's home and the tale: that is, the fact that he can do it at all, and so simply, at that. Up until this point in the tale, it has seemed that Eolus has both his children more or less imprisoned in their "wone," with no freedom to leave as they please. That Machaire is able to leave on his own whim at all is almost shocking, and the extreme brevity and nonchalance of Genius' description of this departure – the two-word phrase "Machaire goth" – is really quite jarring, especially when paired with the end of the line, "Canace abit" (l. 201). Both "goth" and "abit" are active verbs, suggesting that Machaire and Canace have equal amounts of agency in their decisions to either go or stay in their father's house. However, given the control we see Eolus wield over Canace in the coming lines when he learns of her delivery (as well as of the infant's paternity), it seems more likely that, unlike her brother, Canace has no freedom to choose her fate. While Machaire can quite easily choose to "go," Canace does not choose to "abide" – indeed, I am especially intrigued by Peck's glossation of "abit" here. Peck glosses "abit" as "remains," and, while that modern verb can have connotations of agency and activity, it also allows for a more passive reading, in which Machaire leaves and Canace, treated as an object by both her father and, at this point in the tale, her brother, is the remainder (155). Although Eolus, at the tale's outset, appears to be equally invested in controlling both of his children's lives and reproductive capacities, that control quickly disappears when it comes to Machaire, and the son departs with ease. In leaving, Machaire gains his freedom, but at the cost of losing the

intimate connection he had with his sister. As unsettling as their incestuous relationship may be for readers, it is described by Genius as one of genuine love and affection, and Machaire's departure from Canace – and their child – into the wider world signifies his break with that intersubjective relationship, and his entry into the more isolated and individualized world of the patriarchy that his father perpetuates.

Indeed, the fact that Machaire leaves without Canace reveals even more about the ways in which Canace's reproductive powers are the primary focus of both Eolus and the tale itself. As discussed above, Machaire's commission of incest with his sister is what angers his father primarily because it deprives Eolus of his right to bestow his daughter's hand in marriage – as well as, crucially, her virginity and capacity to bear an heir – as he sees fit, and introduces an aspect of power struggle between the son and the father. The fact that, when Machaire leaves, he does so without his sister and lover (and their soon-to-arrive child) reveals that Eolus' control, over both children, runs extremely deep. Above, I stipulated that the ease of Machaire's departure suggests that Eolus cares less about controlling his son and his procreative capacity than his daughter and hers. I would like now to nuance that argument by pointing to the way in which Machaire leaves – that is, alone. We can read Machaire's solitary exit from his father's home in one of two ways: either he is incredibly cowardly and selfish, more concerned with his own hide should his father find out that he has slept with his sister than with bringing with him the woman he claims to love so strongly; or, perhaps more possible, he knows that, although his father contains his children strictly, he actually contains his daughter far more strictly than his son, and a solitary leave-taking is possible, though difficult, while attempting to leave *with* Canace would be outright impossible. If we take the second possibility as closer to the truth, Eolus wins the father-son struggle initiated earlier, in

a way. While Machaire has wrested from his father the right to bestow Canace's virginity on his choice of son-in-law, Eolus deprives his son of his own reproductive agency: Machaire loses access to his son and heir and, later, when Eolus has the child left out to die, Machaire's reproductive line (at least this iteration of it) is stopped.[49] Eolus has successfully put an end to Machaire's (first) attempt at creating his own family line. Somewhat paradoxically, however, Eolus is unable to exert quite the same control over Canace. As we will see below, although he does have his daughter kill herself, and abandon the infant to its death, also putting an end to Canace's attempt at a reproductive line, the very facts of her pregnancy, delivery, and then the striking scene of the infant rolling in its mother's blood all reveal that, despite her father's best efforts, Canace is able to wield some degree of agency regarding her procreative powers. Although both she and the child die shortly thereafter, Canace is, however briefly, able to give life to her child, giving birth and then warm nourishment in the form of first milk and then her blood. Her father's obsessive attempts to control her cannot prevent her from having this too short-lived intersubjective relationship with her child.

Unfortunately for Canace, despite her degree of success in autonomy in some aspects of her life, her life still lies in her father's hands, and, when she understands just how dire her situation is, she uses the exact wrong choice of words and sentiments in her attempt to appeal to her father's mercy. Learning of both the birth and paternity of his grandchild, Eolus begins to vent his wrath against Canace, swearing that she will pay dearly for her crimes. Falling to her knees, Canace pleads to Eolus: "'Ha mercy! Fader, thenk I am / Thi child, and of thi blod I cam'" (ll. 225-226). While her appeal on the grounds of blood relation may inspire mercy in

[49] As my parenthetical note suggests, the path is still quite obviously open for Machaire, now free of his father's control, to choose a new wife and start a family with her, a path that is denied to Canace. However, my argument here is primarily concerned with the immediate familial (Eolus-Machaire-Canace) dynamic, rather than possible future exogamous dynamics.

another, kinder father, it has the opposite effect on Eolus, increasing his rage instead. Rather than reminding him of any love or forgiveness he ought to show his daughter because of their relation, Canace's reminder to her father of the fact that she "came of his blood" serves to reinforce his obsession with controlling her reproductive capacity. After all, it is precisely because Canace is "of his blood" that Eolus has such a deep and abiding need to exert strict authority and power over his daughter's procreation, as any child she bears will also be of his blood. As Bullón-Fernández aptly observes regarding the nature and direction of Eolus' anger, "he does not see his daughter as an independent being, but rather as the flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, as part of himself" (161). Unfortunately, Canace's attempt to inspire mercy in her father only reminds him of this fact, and his desire to control her – whom he sees as an extension of himself – is increased, and any potential for mercy disappears.

Of course, this tale would not be placed at the beginning of Book Three of the *Confessio Amantis*, the book devoted to warning Amans away from the sin of wrath, were there not a horrifically spectacular demonstration of wrath within it, and, tragically for Canace, that demonstration takes the form of Eolus' condemnation of her and her infant to death. In her death, however, she is able to exhibit one last time her procreative capacity, though the gruesome nature of that exhibit reveals, as in *Sir Gowther*, deep anxieties about female reproductive power. Unmoved – or, rather, moved to greater wrath – by Canace's pleas for mercy, Eolus resolves that he cannot show his daughter any mercy, and dispatches one of his knights to bring her a sword with which she is to kill herself. In her final moments, Canace pens a letter to her brother and lover, and then stabs herself in the heart. The scene

immediately following her death is nothing short of horrifying, although a strange tenderness pervades:

> And forthwith that al pale and fade
> Sche fell doun ded fro ther sche stod.
> The child lay bathende in hire blod
> Out rolled fro the moder barm,
> And for the blod was hot and warm,
> He basketh him aboute thrinne. (ll. 310-315)

The stark juxtaposition in this scene, between the grisly character of Canace's death and the innocent "basking" of the infant in his mother's warm blood, makes this climax of the tale rich in significance. Certainly, the baby's cheerful warmth and innocence does not last long. In the space of the next few lines, Eolus arrives to find "how that his dowhter dieth / And how this babe al blody crieth," for the child, now cognizant in at least some measure of the fact that something is wrong with his mother, is no longer content to "bask" (ll. 319-320). While a less stone-hearted grandfather might be moved by this sight to at least pity the child, Eolus shows no signs of his wrath abating, and has the baby "caste…out of honde there, / So that som beste him mai devoure" (ll. 326-327). But for this moment, Canace's child, rolling around gleefully in his mother's warm blood, is content and, most notably, nourished. In death, Canace is certainly no longer able to nurse her child, and, of course, he is soon to become wild beast prey, suggesting that he has already consumed his last meal. And yet, his mother's blood, the raw material not yet converted by her body into breast milk for him, provides him with one last nourishing, nurturing comfort.

The fact that, even in her death, Canace can still, albeit briefly, provide her infant with this nourishment proves just how powerful and strong her capacity for reproduction and nurturing is. Her blood on the floor of the chamber in which her father has kept her contained for her entire life, as it offers her child a final moment of blissful, nurtured, contentment, demonstrates that, in some small but significant way, her female procreative capacity extends beyond her father's obsessive control. Bullón-Fernández writes of this moment as "Canace's final sublime moment of creation," and of the paradox inherent in the life-giving properties and moment of death that her bloodflow represents (169-170). One could even argue that the blood spilled on the floor is overdetermined: at the same time, it could be said to represent a physical manifestation of the crime of incest committed by Canace and Machaire; the corporeal materialization of Eolus' crime of mercilessness and filicide against his daughter; the endurance and depth of Canace's reproductive and creative power; and, quite simply, the very fact of Canace's death. Watt, unlike critics like Rosemary Woolf who see this scene as evidence of Genius' sympathy for Canace, is adamant that this imagery offers little or no redemption: "Nevertheless, the child bathing in its mother's blood is a complex image not only of innocence, but also of original sin. While the immediately preceding portrait of the mother embracing the child in her bosom may remind us of visual images of the Virgin and Christ-child, the baby wallowing in the gore flowing from its mother's corpse is a horrific reversal and parody of the pietà" (203).

Among all these interpretations of this scene, my own is that it represents both the vastness of Canace's procreative and nourishing power, and, at the same time, the violence that is the form taken by male (in this case, her father's) anxiety about that power. Not unlike the nine wet nurses of the young Sir Gowther, Canace, as her female reproductive, nurturing

capacities produce anxiety in the men around her, has that which should be an inexhaustible source of nourishment for her child turned into the site of violence and her death. While the nurses are drained of their milk, the blood that Canace spills onto the floor simultaneously stands for the menstrual/uterine blood that has formed her infant but has great potential for pollution, blood that could still be processed by her body into breast milk, and, as the child rolls in it gleefully, a more abstract and generalized form of nourishment and nurture. Kristeva writes that "blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life* and *vitality* all come together" (*Powers of Horror*, 96, italics original). Perhaps few scenes could demonstrate this crossroads quite as well as Canace's death. The blood in which her infant basks is explicitly abject, as reactions like Watt's demonstrate and, like the mother and wet nurses in *Sir Gowther*, despite what sympathy Genius may have for her, the tale quite ably demonstrates what violent consequences are inflicted on her as a result of that abjection.

St. Christina: Nourishment Contained

Before beginning my analysis of the *Life of St. Christina*, a late 14th-century hagiography by William Paris, and the role of bleeding and nourishment therein, I feel compelled to address the generic elephant in the room: this is a dissertation explicitly focused on, to quote from the title, "Middle English Romance," and yet this text is quite clearly a hagiography. I do not intend to linger on my defense/explanation of this choice for long – after all, an interested reader can find many explorations of the slippage between the romance

and hagiography genres in the High and later Middle Ages.[50] However, I find most compelling, and most relevant to my own reasons for including this text in this chapter, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's statement in her article "Bet…to…rede on holy seyntes lyves…': Romance and Hagiography Again" that she is interested in "what happens if we treat romance and hagiography as forms of exemplary biography, Bildungsroman, narratives proposing and confirming possible socializations for their audiences" (85). Although certainly different in key aspects, both romance and hagiography narratives, particularly in the High and later Middle Ages, had as one of their primary emphases the exploration of how people should live their lives, and, in particular and especially relevant for my project, how people should live their lives in relation to other people. While the *Life of St. Christina* is obviously more directly religious than the other texts discussed in this dissertation, it is as concerned as the others with the questions that drive the project, questions about how the open vulnerability of bleeding effects intersubjectivity in Middle English literature, and about how acts and behaviors of care in these instances of bleeding inform and shape community identities.

St. Christina,[51] like Gowther's mother and wet nurses, as well as Canace, bleeds in a way that is obviously coded as nurturant and procreative. While the bloodshed of many martyrs is given nourishing characteristics in medieval hagiography, two episodes of this

[50] For example, see Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*, University of California Press, 1986; Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance*, Clarendon Press, 1990; Elizabeth Leigh Smith, *Middle English Hagiography and Romance in Fifteenth-Century England: From Competition to Critique*, Edwin Mellen Press, 2002; and the Wogan-Browne article cited above.

[51] It is likely worth noting here that the subject of this text is the saint known as Christina of Bolsena, *not* Christina Mirabilis, also known as Christina the Astonishing. While the latter, a 13th-century martyr, is far better known now (and far more likely to, for instance, be the primary subject of simple internet searches for "St. Christina"), Christina of Bolsena was a 3rd-century early virgin martyr, who, while she never achieved quite the same level of cult status as Margaret or Katherine, was a popular medieval saint, notably lending her name to Christine de Pizan, who lovingly writes of her namesake in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (Reames, 223).

martyrology in particular – the nursing of two snakes and the bleeding of milk when her breasts are torn off – mark Christina as an especially generative and nourishing saint. Unlike that of the other women discussed earlier in this chapter, however, Christina's bloodshed is not regarded as abject, and thus, similar punishment is not inflicted on her. To be sure, she suffers a great deal, as is common among tales of the early martyrs, and, of course, she ultimately loses her life. However, the scenes in which her nourishing acts of bleeding are depicted are demonstrably celebrated as acts of holiness, rather than treated as abject or upsetting. It is tempting to argue that this tale then offers a counterpoint to the central argument of this chapter, that is, that female nurturant bleeding is typically seen as threatening and is therefore punished. However, Christina's bleeding is continuously portrayed as occurring specifically within the structure and limits of Christ's power, signifying that Christina's acts of nourishment, rather than the abject processes of menstruation and breastfeeding that are such sources of anxiety for male authors and audience, are indeed acts of Christ himself. Christina's blood (and milk), the tale emphasizes over and over, is representative of Christ's blood, and the fact that she can sustain her bloodflow without loss of life is an example of Christ's miraculous powers, rather than of unsettling and threatening female procreative powers. That is to say, Christina's nourishing bleeding is never punished – because it is not represented as truly being hers.

Like many early martyrs, Christina faces an almost comically absurd number of assaults on both her new faith and her body.[52] Beginning with her father Urban, Christina is relentlessly beset by a series of three Roman judges, each of whom tries – unsuccessfully, of

[52] These torments include, in order: a naked beating at the command of her father; being bound in chains and imprisoned; flaying with nails and the breaking of her limbs; being placed on a wheel over a fire; an attempted drowning; boiling in oil; physical humiliation of being paraded through the city naked and shaved; being cast into an oven; having snakes sent in to join her in the oven; breasts cut off; tongue cut out; and finally, shot and killed by arrows.

course – to destroy her. Undeterred by any of these attacks, Christina repeatedly returns the hostility back towards her opponents – in one especially striking scene, when her father has her flesh flayed with nails, she throws a piece at his eye, jeering, "'Have here a morcell, teraunt – take it! - / Of the flesche was getyn of thee'" (ll. 239-240). Her stoic mockery of her father here simultaneously suggests her own nourishing powers, a bizarre inversion of the Sacrament, and incest, as she suggests that her father "take" some of the flesh that he begat. Of note in this scene is that, as far as Christina is concerned, by this point her father is father of her flesh only, not her soul. She has taken on as spiritual father and been adopted by Christ, taking his name and rejecting her earthly parentage.[53] Much like the Pope's assertion that Gowther's only parent is God, Christina's assumption of Christ as her only father places her, from the tale's beginning, within the patriarchal mode of reproduction. Although, as she freely admits, her flesh is still heir to Urban, it is only so in the crudest, most physical sense, and Christ's power over her body and blood has already begun. The poem leaves the piece of flesh on the ground where it falls when Urban turns aside so as not to be hit with it, and he does not, indeed, respond to her suggestion that he consume it. Were he to, however, the tale leaves open the – possibly controversial, though not explicitly heretical – possibility that his consumption of it would be an act of Communion, and he would thereby experience a conversion of his own. As a matter of fact, stories of saints and holy women – and men – feeding those around them, not infrequently with their own body and bodily fluids, are extremely common, as Bynum has shown in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. While these stories are never explicitly tales of Communion, the sense of holiness being passed on to the receiver

[53] "'Thi doghter, Urban, clepe me noght, / For fadere will Y never clepe thee; / For on Jhesu is all my thoughte / And His child, sir, will Y be'" (ll. 97-100); "And after Criste, I understonde, / Cristyn may be hir name orighte:" (ll. 275-276).

of the food is described in ways very similar to the Eucharist. Bynum writes, "*to eat* and *to be eaten* express that interpenetration, and mutual engulfing, that fusion of fleshly humanness with fleshly humanness" (156, emphasis original). Were Urban to accept his daughter's dare and consume her flesh, it would certainly be an extremely upsetting scene. However, his rejection of her flesh can be read as yet another rejection of nourishing intersubjectivity.

Having outlasted both her father and his successor as both judge and tormentor of Christina, Dyon, Christina is faced with Julian, who will be her final opponent. Upon learning that his first attempt to kill Christina – casting her into a hot oven – is having no ill effect on her (Christina is wandering around the oven singing with angels), Julian sends for Marces, a sorcerer who works with serpents. Marces sends sixty of his serpents into the oven after Christina, but it is quickly apparent that, as animals of God, the snakes bear her no ill will, and will do her no harm:

> She hath no drede of theym, iwysse,
> But loke upon them, who thei goo;
> Abowte hir nek ther playinge is.
>
> For swett hir nek was wondre wete –
> Too wormes lykkyd it clene away.
> Too wente downe unto hir fete;
> Thai lykkyd them clene, and ther thei lay.
> *At hir pappis too honge to play,*
> *As thei wold soke that maydyn swete.* (ll. 414-422, emphasis added)

While Julian's reaction to the sight of this tableau is one of pure rage, a medieval audience would certainly have been moved by it in a far different way, reading the gentleness of the snakes on Christina's body as tender and holy. Despite my description of this scene above as "Christina nursing the snakes," that is not literally what happens here – Paris is explicitly metaphorical in this moment, in his use of the word "As" at the beginning of line 422. However, the imagery is powerful, and extremely evocative. For Christina to be – at least in appearance, if not in reality – nursing the serpents is an inversion of sorts of the sin of Eve in Eden, combined with imagery of the Virgin Mary nursing the Christ child. Whereas the snake in Eden tempts Eve to sin, Christina's holiness is so great that she converts the snakes to gentleness, as they metaphorically suck from her the milk of Christianity. When Marces, compelled by Julian, attempts to command the snakes to attack Christina, not only is his command ignored, but he is himself attacked and slain by those snakes he believed to be under his control. Demonstrating both the gifts granted to her by Christ and her own creative capacities, Christina then resurrects Marces, "And he stode up before that may" (l. 438). Christina's nourishing powers here are not initially literal – she has not actually fed the snakes with her breast milk – but the figurative, spiritual power of her nurture is quite palpable, as her powers of life-giving, through resurrection, demonstrate.

Christina's powers of nourishment become even more literal as a result of her next attack at Julian's command, as he attacks her breasts, the most concrete external site of female nurturant and procreative power: "Thai kitte them of – the more dole is, / When she was twelve yer of elde. / The mylke stremyd oute – all men beheld" (ll. 443-445). The interjection of her extremely young age between the description of what is done to her breasts and the description of what happens after serves two purposes. First, it does exactly

as the second half of line 443 says it does: it enhances the pathos and tragedy of the torture she receives. Secondly, in emphasizing her youth (and pre-pubescence), it re-enforces that this flow of milk is not connected to any pregnancy or birth but is, in fact, miraculously and divinely granted to Christina.[54] This fact simultaneously dramatically expands and constricts the scope of Christina's reproductive, nourishing powers. On the one hand, it expands the scope of her powers by demonstrating that, even without having recently given birth, and even at an age most likely too young to conceive, Christina's powers of nourishment are able to make themselves known, flowing the more pure, processed milk out of her torn breasts than the more corrupted (and expected) blood. As young as 12, she is able to symbolically (for no one is actually described as drinking the milk, only witnessing it) nourish an entire community with the evidence of her holiness. Additionally, she is pure enough and favored enough by Christ to lose only milk, not blood.

On the other hand, the divinity of Christina's miraculous bloodflow evinces that ultimately, her nurturant capacities are not truly her own. In bleeding milk from her mutilated breasts, Christina joins a community of divine figures notably portrayed as doing such.[55] Other saints credited with the same miraculous flow include St. Victor, Paul the Apostle, and St. Martina. Furthermore, Christ himself is portrayed in much medieval literature and art as bleeding milk. In *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Bynum discusses the shift in iconography from a

[54] Amundsen and Diers, 1973, present a survey of medieval writings about the age of menarche throughout the Middle Ages, and conclude that, with a few rare exceptions, women of the era experienced their first period between the ages of 13 and 15. Thus, while it was not completely unheard of for a girl as young as 12 to have already begun to menstruate, it was notably rare, and thus the specificity of Christina's age marks her as pre-menarche.

[55] According to Bynum, "The bodies of holy women were frequently seen by medieval people as exuding miraculous fluids, substances, or odors. Of the three most famous myroblytes of the Middle Ages, two (Catherine of Alexandria – who supposedly bled milk when beheaded – and Elizabeth of Hungary) were women, and although research remains to be done on the distribution of this phenomenon, a disproportionate number of medieval myroblytes appear to have been women – for example, Walburga, Hedwig of Silesia, Agnes of Montepulciano, and Lutgard" (*Holy Feast*, 211).

lactating Christ in the earlier Middle Ages to a bleeding Christ in the later Middle Ages, pausing on a particular 15th-century Italian painting in which the two iconographies overlap, as "a young, to our eyes somewhat feminine, and very beautiful Christ display[s] the wound in his right side, located high up, where a nipple would be. He lifts up and offers the wound with two fingers of his left hand, just as the Virgin offers her breast to the infant Christ in hundreds of medieval paintings" (271-272). Both by placing Christina into that community of sacred figures who bleed, and by making it clear that her flow of milk is expressly divinely inspired, rather than the natural flow of milk from the breasts of a new mother, Paris – and her Life in general, as re-told by other authors, including Osbern Bokenham, Jacobus de Voragine, and Christine de Pizan – contains Christina's nourishing, reproductive capacities within the structure of Christ and God: both, of course, male figures. That is to say, Christina is granted a dramatic, spectacular capacity for nourishment and generation, but only how and when Christ wills it. Her procreative, nurturant powers are not those that occur naturally in women like Gowther's mother or Canace – she does not menstruate, when milk flows from her body it is preceded by divine interference rather than the birth of a child, and when she does give life, it is in the act of resurrecting a previously living man, rather than engendering and giving birth to a new infant. Because these powers are given to her and controlled by Christ and her holiness, they could, theoretically, be taken away at any point, setting them apart from the menstruation, lactation, and parturition explored in the other examples in this chapter, as the women in those texts lactate and menstruate without arbitrary end controlled by Christ or another male figure. Indeed, my argument throughout this chapter has been that those women suffer violence at the hands of men who are explicitly threatened by the women's ability to lactate and bleed without end. The deaths (or mutilation, in the case of

Gowther's mother) suffered by these women are the closest the men in their lives can get to putting a stop to the matriarchal model of reproduction, since these men cannot simply interrupt that model, as Christ does to Christina's.

As she is a martyr, Christina herself of course must die eventually, and when she does, her death is both reminiscent of Christ's, and a symbolic containment of her body within a male power structure: "But thre arraws he shett hir to, / And too ageyn hir herte thei lyght; / The thirde hit in hir syde full righte" (ll. 483-485). As discussed in Chapter Two in regards to Ferumbras, depictions in medieval literature of someone having been pierced in the side are almost always evocative of – if not explicitly in reference to – Christ on the cross, stabbed in the side by Longinus' spear. The order of the narrative of Christina's wounds, with the two in the heart being listed first, and the one in the side listed last, suggests that it is this side wound that is the death blow, connecting Christina to her Godfather and namesake even more, as it implies that it is only when she is at her most Christ-like that she can finally die, and "feele of paynes no moo" (l. 488). Her penetrative death, through three arrows (rather than, for example, beheading, as is the cause of death for several other martyrs), once more places her within the constraints of male power. Although, given her survival of eleven previous attempts on her life, including drowning, boiling, and flaying, it seems that it is more Christ allowing her to die in this moment than it is truly the arrows actively killing her, it is difficult to ignore the fact that it is only this, the last torture and the one that brings her death, that is penetrative. Karen Winstead draws our attention to an illustration of Christina's execution from *The Queen Mary Psalter*, MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 257, in which Christina, oddly, is being stabbed to death by two men. As Winstead notes, "This rendering of Christine's martyrdom is especially striking because in all written

versions of the Christine legend that I know of, Julian's men dispatch the saint by shooting her full of arrows" (87, 90). The likely explanation for this unusual illustration, Winstead purports, is that the depicted form of death, that is, stabbing, is "a gesture strongly suggestive of rape," emphasizing the penetrative nature of Christina's death (87). That is to say, the penetrative character of Christina's death was notable enough to the 14th century "Queen Mary Master" to depict it not literally correctly, but in a way that the sexual, especially rape-like, connotations of her death are the focus of the miniature. Thomas J. Heffernan's description of the trope of many martyrologies of young female saints ending with a "consummation" of the saints' relationship with Christ fits together extremely well with the penetrative nature of Christina's death (273-275). In her final moment, Christina is bodily pierced at the same time that her relationship with Christ becomes complete, in a sort of nuptial union.

Unlike many nuptial unions, another striking feature of Christina's death is that it is, despite its cause, as narrated within the poem, completely bloodless. Paris makes no mention of the loss of any fluids from Christina's fatal wounds, and simply tells his reader that, "when Cristyn was smyten so, / Hir soule wente up to heven so brighte, / Where she shall feele of peynes no moo" (ll. 486-488). In her final moment, she does not bleed at all, and this bloodless death, after her many torments, signifies that she is completely different from the typical bleeding female figure of medieval literature. The argument could be made that, in the bloodlessness of her death, Christina is simply characteristic of any martyr figure, made miraculously impervious to the wounds and torture of regular humans by the power of faith and Christ. However, when Christina's death is put into conversation, as I have done here, with those of her torments focused on procreative and nourishing powers, an image emerges

not simply of a typical martyr, but instead a woman whose generative and nurturant capabilities have been neatly and tightly constrained within the limits of a patriarchal, Christian power structure. Christina, in her remarkable bloodlessness, fits quite neatly into Bynum's discussion of the medieval portrayal of powerful, holy female bodies: "Closing herself off to ordinary food yet consuming God in the eucharist, the holy woman became God's body. And that body flowed out, not in the involuntary effluvia of urine or menstrual blood or dandruff, but in a *chosen* suffering, a *chosen* excreting, that washed, fed, and saved the world" (*Holy Feast*, 274, emphasis original). Although Christina does not partake in extreme fasting like many of the women Bynum discusses, the redirection of her body's flowing into only that which is an extension of and approved by Christ demonstrates that Christina's generative powers are very specifically contained.

Conclusion

The procreative female body poses a direct threat to the patriarchy and its highly individualized, unidirectional model of creation and reproduction. As the female body is able, through menstruation, pregnancy, and breast feeding, to create and sustain other life in a way that is extraordinarily intersubjective, it demonstrates just how much more powerful it is than the male body and patriarchal modes of interaction. As this chapter shows, the response to this power of many medieval male authors, men for whom the patriarchal model of creation was central to their profession, was to punish or constrain, through their stories, women, particularly at the site of that powerful reproduction and nourishment they are able to perform. As the example of St. Christina shows, when that female reproductive and nourishing power is contained within a male power structure, exemplified by Christina's body being a medium for Christ's grace, no punishment is needed. Likewise, as the "Tale of

Canace and Machaire" shows, patriarchal control over female reproductive powers is tantamount, and it is precisely when those powers escape patriarchal control that punishment is necessary. Indeed, the order of texts discussed in this chapter could have been reversed to show a different logical order, beginning with Christina, whose powers are completely contained within the divinely patriarchal framework; moving to Canace, who is contained only up to a point; and then ending with Sir Gowther's mother, who, in her reproduction of her son with an incubus acts most outside of the bounds of the patriarchy.

The obsession of these male writers with the threateningly abject matriarchal model of intersubjective reproduction goes as far, in two of these texts, as asserting that two of the characters have neither mother nor (physical) father. In both *Sir Gowther* and the *Life of St. Christina*, the titular characters are, at some point, said to be the child of merely God or Christ, and their earthly parents are rejected. While this sterile model of reproduction and descent works (to an extent) in a literary setting, it cannot work in reality, as it ignores one crucial part of the reproductive process. This model, as seen in the examples of both Gowther and Christina, takes care of one part of the creative process – literally, the sole creation of the new life. But what this model ignores is the very central fact and act of this chapter: nourishment beyond the mere moment of creation. While the patriarchal model attempts, with varying degrees of success, to imitate the childbirth aspect of reproduction, it completely neglects the subsequent breast feeding. Indeed, not only does it ignore this aspect, but, as shown in all of the texts in this chapter, it outright scorns and punishes that aspect, targeting nourishment for all of the anger it directs at the matriarchal model of creation. This type of nourishment is, by its very nature, extraordinarily intersubjective: as the mother gives suck to her infant, both open to each other in ways that have dramatic effect on the

development of each. Therefore, it is no wonder that the patriarchy is so threatened by this act: no matter how many times the patriarchy punishes the matriarchy in literature for this power, and no matter how many times it attempts to re-write the process of reproduction as masculine only, without the capacity for the deeply intersubjective power of nourishment, it will never be as powerful as the matriarchy.

CHAPTER FOUR – CLOSED NARRATIVE, CLOSED BLOODLINE

In this fourth and final chapter of my dissertation, several strands come together in my analysis of Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale," and Gower's "The Tale of Constance." The notion of bleeding as expression and the power of narrative from Chapter One, the idea of the dangers of over-containment from Chapter Two, and the obsessive control over matriarchal power from Chapter Three all intersect in my discussion of the Constance[56] story. Throughout the tale, as portrayed by both Chaucer and Gower, Constance has no control over her own narrative. Others – including the Man of Law and Genius – insist on telling it for her, and the narrative they tell is both a closed and circular one. The narrative imposed on Constance is closed in the sense that, by miraculously protecting her from the myriad attacks on her person, it renders her invulnerable, a body and self closed off to all others. In this closure, her narrative is also circular, as it leads her right back to where she began, with her father in an ending that has struck many readers as distinctly suggestive of incest. Indeed, I contend that Constance's closed narrative, and her lack of agency in it, is a metaphor for an endogamous, or, to be more explicit, incestuous, family and bloodline. Her inability to tell her own narrative is analogous to her inability to decide what happens to her own blood(line). Closed narratives like Constance's, like incest/endogamy, necessarily forestall any real intersubjectivity, or affective empathy. Thus, the narrative invulnerability imposed on Constance, while it does save her life numerous times, also prevents her from achieving any real intersubjectivity and is directly linked, I argue, to the incestuous overtones of the end of both versions of the tale.

[56] In Gower's "Tale of Constance," the central character is named Constance; in the "Man of Law's Tale," she is named Custance, and, thus, the majority of scholarship on Chaucer's tale refers to her as such. For clarity's sake, and because the story, in its many iterations (including Gower and Chaucer's primary source, Nicholas Trivet's *Annales*), is typically known as the "Constance Saga," I will, when speaking of the character in general, refer to her as Constance. I will only refer to her as Custance when directly quoting the "Man of Law's Tale."

I am hardly the first scholar to note that the end of the story – in both Gower and Chaucer – stinks of incest. Among many others, Elizabeth Allen, Elizabeth Archibald, Maria Bullón-Fernández, and Carolyn Dinshaw have commented on the suggestions of incest rife in the tale's conclusion, as well as in the relationships between both of Constance's husbands and their mothers. Likewise, Margaret Schlauch's thorough study of the "Accused Queen" narrative and all of its analogues has successfully demonstrated the tale's ancestry in a more explicitly incestuous narrative. Rather than rehearse their criticism, I argue that the incestuous undertones are directly related to Constance's circular story, and the narrative invulnerability imposed on her by others. R.A. Shoaf writes of a "pseudo-circulation – the simulacrum of circulation" within the tale, particularly as it pertains to Constance's circulation, that I read as well ("Unwemmed Custance," 288). Just as the circulation *of* Constance is merely a simulacrum, in that she never really finds herself integrated into any of the societies she travels to, so too is the circulation within her and in any exchanges between her and others. What is remarkable is that Constance, despite all of the attacks on her person, conspicuously *never bleeds*. The way in which she is, instead of being killed or wounded, constantly set afloat in the ocean – notably by her mothers-in-law – suggests that there is, indeed, something about her that is fundamentally invulnerable, preventing her would-be assailants from doing her any harm. This narrative invulnerability sounds like a good thing; throughout the tale, both Genius and the Man of Law, Constance's narrators, repeatedly comment positively on her narrow escapes, and praise Christ and Mary for her survival. However, as the tale more subtly shows, Constance's lack of agency in the telling of this circular, invulnerable narrative is profoundly *not* a good thing. Never able to determine her own, potentially vulnerable, narrative, Constance fails to connect in a lastingly

intersubjective fashion with anyone other than her father. Scholarly criticism about the palpable sense of discomfort with the quasi-incestuous end of the tale predominantly ignores the fact that it is this narrative invulnerability, this excessive impenetrability and its attendant lack of intersubjectivity, which actually pervades and rules the story, leaving readers of both versions with an unmistakable unease.

To be sure, Constance's impenetrability is most definitely connected to the fact that, as indicated by her name, the tale is ostensibly an allegory about Constancy. As Shoaf writes, Constance "is constant, she is constancy itself, immune from the other" (*Chaucer's Body*, 38). As the allegorical figure of Constancy, Constance cannot be anything other than, to use Shoaf's word, immune to everyone and everything around her. For her to be noticeably changed by any of her interactions would be for the allegory to fall apart. And yet, it already does fall apart in places, making the use of "It's an allegory for Constancy!" an insufficient explanation for Constance's thorough invulnerability. One way in which the allegory begins to crumble is in the very presentation of constancy. As Esther Cohen writes, according to Late Antique writers, "constancy was the reverse of fear of pain and the yielding to passions" (126). While it can be said that Constance does seem to possess the latter attribute, the way in which the narrative repeatedly protects her from any substantial threat of injury means that she is never really given the chance to show that she is not afraid of pain. Applying a purely allegorical focus to our reading of the story is also complicated by Chaucer's decision to name his heroine Custance, rather than the more obvious Constance used by Gower and their shared source, Nicholas Trivet. As scholars like Archibald have pointed out, this naming choice on Chaucer's part suggests that, "he seems to draw back from explicit personification of the virtue" (177, fn. 67). Ultimately, I think that, when it comes to explaining Constance's

remarkable invulnerability throughout the tale, the fact of its being an allegory for Constancy is merely a small part of the puzzle, rather than the decisive explanation.

The fact that Constance is continually denied the chance to be the teller of her own narrative is just as important to and responsible for the incestuous overtones of the tale's conclusion as the closed and circular nature of that narrative. As explored in Chapter Two in the discussion of Gawain's return to the Round Table at the end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the chance to tell and have one's own narrative heard and acknowledged is crucial to the process of care. Rita Charon writes very pragmatically that, "The serious consequences of not being able to do this kind of narratively sophisticated listening is that patients' symptoms get dismissed, their nonmedical concerns get ignored, and treatable disease gets missed" (67). She later articulates that, on a larger scale, careful listening to patients' narratives can enable medical practitioners "to commit acts of particularized and efficacious recognition that lead beyond empathy to the chance to restore power or control to those who have suffered" (181). By listening to patients' narratives, that is, physicians and nurses can care for those patients in a fundamentally human way. In contrast is the caregiver who denies their patient the opportunity to tell their own narrative: whether that is the physician who interrupts a patient to "correct" their version of their pain, insisting that the numbers from their blood test don't reflect that reality; the members of the Round Table who laugh at Gawain's story, rather than showing him empathy for the pain and guilt he so clearly feels; or the narrators and characters who repeatedly wrest Constance's story away from her, denying her the chance to tell it herself. This type of treatment, then, to use Charon's logic, further denies the patient, or sufferer, any power or control over their lives and suffering. In being continually denied the chance to tell her own story, Constance is also denied any real agency

over her sexuality. Unfortunately, as we observe from the tale's opening to its conclusion, it is her father who exerts the most control over this part of her narrative, leading her to the tale's quasi-incestuous end.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will be considering the two texts (Chaucer and Gower's versions of the tale) as two parts of a dialogue about incest, narrative, and constancy. I do not mean to elide the differences between Chaucer and Gower's versions of the tale. The differences between them are numerous and significant, and they have been the focus of the attention of a number of critics; however, these details are beyond the scope of the argument of this chapter.[57] One of the several ways in which it is clear that Gower and Chaucer's versions of the story are both part of an identifiably cohesive unit is the fact that both poets very clearly situate the tale within a conversation specifically about incest. The near obsession of the Man of Law, in his Prologue, with not telling stories of the "unkynde abhomynacions" of characters like Canace and Machaire or Antiochus and his daughter ultimately makes just such tales of incest the focus of attention in his narrative (II.88). Likewise, as Bullón-Fernández has compellingly argued, incest, particularly between fathers and daughters, haunts the entire *Confessio Amantis* as one of its primary themes. As discussed above, several analogues of the tale are explicit in their references to incest, so Chaucer and Gower are not unique in their acknowledgment of the incestuous themes of the story. However, the most immediate source for the version of the story both poets tell, Nicholas Trivet's early 14th-century *Annales*, contains no overt incest. Thus, the decision on

[57] See, for example, Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, Clarendon: Oxford, 2001, pp. 147-61; María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's* Confessio Amantis, D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2000, pp. 75-101; and Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R.F. Yeager, Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1989, pp. 65-93. Among other arguments, these differences have led scholars to announce definitively that each version is poetically and dramatically superior to the other. I make no such qualitative judgment.

the parts of both Gower and Chaucer to tell versions of the tale in which the incest is suppressed, but still an extant specter, and to situate their versions, in the context of the larger works in which they appear, within conversations blatantly about incest, is unique and ties the two texts together. Before turning to my close reading of the texts, I would like to briefly take some time to frame this conversation about incest, both within the medieval literary realm, as well as in the larger anthropological and critical realm.

The Traffic in Constance – Incest in the Middle Ages[58]

For nearly 70 years, most Western thought about incest and its prohibitions has been dominated in part by the alliance theory put forward by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. That theory, of course, states that all cultures throughout the world are united in their incest prohibition, which is predicated on the idea that women, and marriage to them, are primarily a useful tool for arranging alliances between different families, tribes, kingdoms, etc. As Lévi-Strauss famously articulates it in his conclusion, "The prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others. It is the supreme rule of the gift, and it is clearly this aspect, too often unrecognized, which allows its nature to be understood" (481). At its heart, although Lévi-Strauss does not express it as such, this alliance theory is predicated on the importance of intercultural relations. Each time a woman is married into a different family, tribe, etc. from her own, a connection – what Lévi-Strauss terms an "alliance" – is made between the two groups. These inter-tribal connections, and the marriages that create them, can be understood as intersubjective, as

[58] Much of this section is greatly indebted to Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. Her research on medieval attitudes towards and laws regarding incest is profoundly thorough, and her incorporation of discussion of medieval literature, primarily romances, alongside her historical research, is incredibly helpful and insightful.

through them, members of one group come to understand and relate to members of the other group not as aliens but as extended family members worthy of empathy. Exogamy, in other words, has intersubjectivity as one of its potential consequences.

The most well-known response to Lévi-Strauss's theory is Gayle Rubin's seminal essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," originally published in 1975.[59] Early in his volume, Lévi-Strauss posits that not only is the incest taboo universal to all human cultures, but that it is, in fact, what makes a group of people a culture: "The incest prohibition is at once on the threshold of culture, in culture, and in one sense, as we shall try to show, culture itself" (12). As Rubin notes, this theory is deeply problematic, as it suggests that "if there were no exchange of women there would be no culture" (46). Rubin reminds her readers that "culture is, by definition, inventive," and that to assume that culture is impossible without the subjugating trade of women as capital is as dangerous as it is unsettling (ibid.). Rubin's contention that the exchange of women is as deeply interconnected with structures of capitalist economy as it is with structures of alliance nuances Lévi-Strauss's claim, foregrounding the importance of labor theory to the understanding of the incest taboo, while also allowing for the imagination of a culture *not* based on the traffic of women in such a manner.

Judith Butler, too, responds to Lévi-Strauss throughout a good portion of *Gender Trouble*. Exogamy as described by Lévi-Strauss, she observes, is fundamentally concerned with making bonds – but only bonds between men. "The relations among patrilineal clans," she writes, "are based in homosocial desire…a repressed and, hence, disparaged sexuality, a

[59] All references to Rubin in this chapter are from the reprinting of the essay in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader,* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011. The version of the essay in this volume is from Karen Hansen and Ilene Philipson, eds., *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination*, Philadelphia: Temple, 1990, 74-113.

relationship between men which is, finally, about the bonds of men, but which takes place through the heterosexual exchange and distribution of women" (55). Women, therefore, become the objects to be traded – as Rubin notes, in a particularly capitalistic form of trade – in order to create and foster intercultural and homosocial relationships between men.

In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1,* Michel Foucault also comments on Lévi-Strauss's assertion of the universality of the incest taboo, commenting that, "If one considers the threshold of all culture to be prohibited incest, then sexuality has been, from the dawn of time, under the sway of law and right" (109-110). Foucault's commentary smoothly connects Lévi-Strauss's theory to his own central thesis regarding political surveillance of and control over sexuality. Unfortunately, as is the case for much of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1,* despite Foucault's sweeping application of his thesis "from the dawn of time," his discussion of the application of this political power over sexuality, in particular as it regards incest, begins simply "since the seventeenth century," leaving the Middle Ages largely undiscussed (110). Foucault identifies a clear break in political and cultural attitudes towards sexuality beginning in the seventeenth century, with the Middle Ages as a distinctly different period, "organized around the theme of the flesh" and, of course, "*a symbolics of blood*" (33; 148, emphasis original). That Foucault's insistence on a radical shift in attitudes towards the body and sexuality between the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century and beyond is ultimately irresponsible – and demonstrably incorrect – is especially evident in the case of the incest taboo, which reveals just as much of an obsessive political control over sexuality in the medieval period as in the later centuries Foucault focuses on. While a "*symbolics of blood*" was, indeed, a key part of medieval incest laws, sexuality and its curtailment was just as much of a reason for medieval incest prohibitions as interests in preserving and controlling

bloodlines. In other words, medieval incest prohibitions were as concerned with what people *did* sexually as they were with how that sexual activity might affect bloodlines. The two concerns were just as deeply intertwined in the Middle Ages as Foucualt has thoroughly shown them to be in the Englightenment.

Indeed, as Archibald demonstrates, "In the Middle Ages the prohibitions relating to marriage and also intercourse with relatives were extended to a degree unprecedented in any other society; the family was defined so broadly as to include not only biological and social relationships but also spiritual ones" (11). Laws of the tenth through twelfth centuries, the strictest and most far-reaching of the period, "banned sexual intercourse between all relatives connected by consanguinity or affinity to the seventh degree, and between persons linked by compaternity (spiritual affinity) to the fourth degree" (ibid.). While, as Archibald allows, the small size of many medieval villages must have led to these prohibitions being more honored in the breach than in the observing, especially for cousins of any degree over second, the very existence of these prohibitions, particularly concerning relationships of spiritual affinity rather than consanguinity, demonstrates that the power structures of the Middle Ages were just as invested in obsessively surveilling and limiting the expression of human sexuality as those in Foucault's Age of Enlightenment. As a matter of fact, relegating medieval incest prohibitions to simply being a part of the "symbolics of blood" ignores the fact that, while the ruling families of the Middle Ages were absolutely obsessed with preserving easily identifiable bloodlines of power, it seems that it was not until the sixteenth century that issues of genetics and inbreeding entered the discourse surrounding incest taboos. As Archibald writes, "This justification (i.e., the dangers of inbreeding) for the incest taboo, which was cited by Robert Burton in the sixteenth century, may have been widely accepted in the

Middle Ages, but explicit references to it are very rare" (50). Archibald suggests that perhaps mutations or deformities resulting from incest would have been interpreted as divine punishment, rather than biological repercussions, of the incest. Indeed, in my research of medieval medical texts, I have yet to come across any explanation of physical or mental deformities as being caused by the parents being (too closely) related.

Constance's Closed Narrative

I begin my discussion of Constance's perilously invulnerable narrative with the episode of the massacre in Syria, the first time that Constance is confronted with a terrifyingly bloody scene in which she somehow remains unwounded. Constance's very engagement and marriage to the Sultan of Barbary serves as the first instance of Constance's body and person being used as the object of circulation, rather than an active agent of healthy internal circulation and vulnerability. As Dinshaw draws our attention to, in the "Man of Law's Tale," Constance is first introduced as the subject of conversation between men, as the Syrian merchants in Rome hear of her renown, which they then repeat to their Sultan upon their return to Syria (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 95). Taking back to him what they have learned of Constance from "the commune voys of every man" in Rome, thereby convincing him to send to her father for her hand in marriage, they effectively transform Constance into a narrative object to be transmitted from man to man (II.155). Likewise in Gower, Constance is similarly introduced as the subject of discourse and narrative – here the discourse of the whole world, not just Rome – before she is introduced in any other manner:

> And sche the God so wel apaide,
> That *al the wide worldes fame*
> *Spak worschipe of hire goode name.*

Constance, as the cronique seith,

Sche hite… (ll. 594-598, emphasis added)

Dinshaw's summary of this opening as demonstrating that "This woman exists not only in but as narrative" underscores the dehumanization and objectification of Constance that takes place within no fewer than the first thirty lines of the Man of Law's narration (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*,95). As the topic of transmission, rather than an active agent and subject or narrator of her own life, Constance is already positioned as somehow incapable of true intersubjective agency.

Constance's status as the dehumanized narrative object of trade directly leads to her position as a bride who becomes an object of alliance-forming trade between her father, Emperor of Rome, and the Sultan of Syria. In Chaucer, Constance bemoans her fate as the mere object of trade between the two men: "'Wommen are born to thralldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance'" (II.286-287). Although she is clearly terrified of being sent "unto the Barbre nacioun," she fully accepts her role, as a woman, as stripped of agency and instead subject to her father's will (II.281). In Gower, she does not even voice her objection; in fact, her feelings on the topic of her marriage are completely absent from the narrative. All that Genius reports is that her "fader in himselve / Was glad, and with the pope avised" to send Constance to Syria, along with two cardinals and other men, to marry the Sultan and effect the conversion of the Syrians (ll. 634-635). Here, not only is Constance denied a voice or reaction to her fate, but she has become the object of discourse with another man, the Pope. Her role as an effective body is prized above all else – as a means of solidifying an alliance bond between Rome and Syria, and as a means of converting Saracens to Christianity. Thus in both Gower and Chaucer, long before Constance is shown to be a

subject with any autonomy, she is doubly an object – primarily an object of circulation. As an object that is circulated and exchanged, rather than a subject who circulates or exchanges, Constance is situated outside the group of those who can be successfully intersubjective in their interactions.

As soon as she is circulated to Syria, Constance is witness to – and yet completely unwounded by – the gruesome mass murder enacted by her mother-in-law, the Sultan's mother.Everyone, including the Sultan himself, is slaughtered at the table; everyone, that is, except for Constance. The Man of Law starkly narrates the suddenness of the violence:

> For shortly for to tellen, at o word,
> The Sowdan and the Cristen everichone
> Been al tohewe and stiked at the bord,
> But it were oonly dame Custance allone. (II.428-431)

In Gower, Genius' depiction of the scene is far more gory and explicit in its bloodiness – a bloodiness that simultaneously emphasizes Constance's own absence of bleeding:

> To se the feste how that it stod,
> Which al was torned into blod.
> The dissh forth with the coppe and al
> Bebled thei weren overal. (ll. 697-700)

Most striking, of course, in both of these depictions, is the fact that Constance somehow has avoided the blades of the Sultan's mother and her accomplices. Chaucer's reference to "The Sowdan and the Cristen *everichone*" is both expansive and ironic in its very expansiveness for, as we learn two lines later, it is not indeed *everyone* who has been killed, but *everyone except Constance*. Likewise, Gower's description of the scene as seen through Constance's,

the lone witness', eyes, ("This worthi maiden which was there / Stod thane, as who seith, ded for feere, / *To se* the feste how that it stod" [ll. 695-697, emphasis added]) might as well hit its reader over the head with the explicit reminder that this means Constance is the only unwounded person amidst an almost literal bloodbath. This obsessive emphasis, on both Chaucer and Gower's parts, on Constance's uniquely intact status at this point makes her invulnerability a core focus of the tale early on.

Worth questioning at this point is *why* Constance alone is spared from the violence inflicted upon the rest of the wedding party. Certainly, it would seem that the Sultan's mother's anger at her son's conversion and marriage to a Christian woman would best be taken out on that Christian daughter-in-law by slaughtering her as well, which renders Constance's survival of the feast perplexing. One might instead argue that the older woman appears to think that it will be worse for Constance to be the sole surviving witness of the atrocities. The horror for Constance of her singular survival is palpable for the reader after the scenes depicted above. No textual support for this reasoning on the part of the Sultan's mother is present in either version, however. I offer a different explanation for the sparing of Constance. This explanation is that Constance's death – especially a wounded, bloody death – is not only unnecessary for the Sultan's mother, but actually would be detrimental to her purposes. As the Sultan's mother states in both Gower and Chaucer, her primary concern and cause of anger regarding her son's marriage lies in her fears about Constance's bloodline interrupting her own. In Chaucer, she exclaims to her co-conspirators that she would rather die than allow Christianity – the religion that Constance's body, and her marriage to the Sultan, brings into Syria – to hold her body in "thraldom" (II.338). More explicitly

addressing the interruption of Constance into her bloodline, Gower's version of the Sultan's mother bemoans to herself:

> 'If so it is
>
> Mi sone him wedde in this manere,
>
> Than have I lost my joies hiere,
>
> *For myn astat schal so be lassed*.' (ll. 646-649, emphasis added)

While these two complaints may initially seem very different – dislike of Christianity as opposed to the decrease of an estate – at their heart, they are both concerned with Constance's marriage to the Sultan resulting in his mother's power over his life and bloodline decreasing. Several scholars, including Schlauch and Dinshaw, have paid great attention to the wicked mothers-in-law of the tale, as both the Sultan's unnamed mother and Domilde/Donegild, Constance's second mother-in-law, demonstrate brutal obsession over possession of their sons' bloodlines. Schlauch contends that this element of the tale has its roots in earlier, matrilineal societies, and the transition away from them: stories like this, she says, "bear traces of an origin among people who were living in such a transitional stage, when filial allegiance was beginning to shift to marital allegiance," and that, if we hold that to be the case, then, "it is easier to understand the hostility of the mother-in-law to any arrangement which might shift her son's allegiance and support from her own domicile to his wife's" (34). If the Sultan's mother and Domilde/Donegild are meant to embody this older, filial organization of society, then their anxiety about Constance's taking their place in their sons' lives is more fully comprehensible. Much like the way in which the family of Constance, her father, and her son will end the tale as an enclosed circle, Constance's

mothers-in-law are also invested in maintaining the impregnability of their own – and their sons' – bloodlines.

Not entirely different from Schlauch's interpretation, Dinshaw, as well as other critics, ascribes the rancor of Constance's mothers-in-law towards her to their own "incestuous desires" for their sons (*Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*,103). In Dinshaw's interpretation, the mothers-in-law are possessive of their sons' bloodlines not just because they desire to remain in control of them politically, but because, in them as well as in Constance's father, incestuous desires are suppressed, but very much still exist. Thus, Constance's marriage to their sons is a sexual threat as well as a political one. Whether we read the Sultan's mother (as well as Domilde/Donegilde) as threatened by Constance's influence on her bloodline in a political mode, a sexual one, or a combination thereof, what remains the truth is that she is overwhelmingly concerned with Constance – and, importantly, her blood – interrupting and changing her son's and her own bloodline. Thus, part of the explanation for Constance's survival of the massacre at the wedding feast lies in the fact that to open Constance with a wound, allowing her blood to flow, especially next to the Sultan, also wounded with his blood flowing, would be to allow their bloods to mingle – which is, of course, the very thing that the Sultan's mother wants to prevent. Rather than allowing her body and her soul – or, more importantly, her son's – to be exposed to the potentially polluting blood of Constance, the Sultan's mother leaves the young woman unwounded and closed. It is more important to the Sultan's mother that Constance's bloodline – and narrative – remain its own closed entity, not interfering with the Sultan's own, than that she die.

Contrasting deeply with the very clean and bloodless survival of Constance is the graphically bloody depiction of the wedding feast massacre in the version of the tale found in

the *Confessio Amantis*. In reading Gower's imagery, we can feel Constance's horror at the scene, especially at the dish and cup "bebled," a grotesque, blasphemous mockery of both the Holy Grail and the sacrament. Wetherbee's observation that this grotesqueness "provides a measure of the alienation of the culture of Barbarie, not only from Christianity, but from simply human *pietas*" emphasizes the complete failure of Constance, in this instance, to successfully incorporate herself with her first husband and his nation (71). A conversion has certainly taken place – but, rather than the conversion of the Sultan and his men to Christianity,[60] the real conversion has been from holy wedding feast to desecrated bloodbath, and from the sacred water and wine of baptism and Communion to profane gore.

This conversion, or at least confusion, of fluids is also pointed at in Chaucer, when the Sultan's mother plots the feigned conversion and subsequent massacre to be performed by herself and her followers:

> "We shul first feyne us cristendom to take, -
> Coold water shal nat greve us but a lite!
> And I shal swich a feeste and revel make
> That, as I trowe, I shal the Sowdan quite.
> For thogh his wyf be cristned never so white,
> She shal have need to wasshe awey the rede,
> Thogh she a font-ful water with hire lede." (II.351-357)

[60] It is worth emphasizing here that this conversion which is supposed to have taken place was both actively sought by the Sultan and his men – therefore, not an attempted imposition on Constance's part – and also inspired by what was detailed above as the circulated narrative form that Constance first takes in the tale. That is to say, it is Constance's objectified form that initiates the desire for the conversion, and her more autonomous, invulnerable form that prevents its consummation.

The Sultan's mother's simultaneous dismissal of the sacramental water of baptism as "Coold water" that "shal nat greve us but a lite!" and promise that Constance will find even a font[61] full of water insufficient for washing off the blood from the massacre conflates the two substances in much the same way that Gower's account of the "bebled" dish and cup does. This repeated conflation and confusion of the fluids of baptismal water, divine Sacrament, and sacrilegious gore demonstrates that the holy liquids of Christianity have failed in their effectiveness in this episode. Constance, who was supposed to be the object of circulation and, thereby, agent of conversion, has, in her adamant invulnerability, failed to integrate herself – and her Christianity – among the Saracens.

The pattern continues of Constance, despite being the central target of another character's rage, remaining completely unharmed while intimately and grotesquely faced with a scene of plentiful blood. In this instance, however, the act of conversion that Constance's body either attempts or is supposed to enact is successful. As an act of revenge and envy, a knight sexually rejected by Constance kills Hermengyld, her newfound companion, in her sleep next to Constance, leaving the "blody knyf" – and the guilt associated with it – on Constance's pillow (Chaucer, II.601). When Hermengyld's husband Elda returns home before Constance has awoken, he "fond his dede wif bledende" next to the heroine (Gower, l. 840). Once more, we as readers are left somewhat flummoxed by the perpetrator's (in this case, the rebuffed knight) lack of direct violence against Constance, especially juxtaposed with the extreme violence directed just next to her. Why, we ask, does the knight choose to murder Hermengyld and frame Constance for the murder, rather than

[61] Indeed, even the Sultan's mother's choice of the word "font-ful" demonstrates her scorn for the power of the water of baptism, as both the OED and MED define a font as exclusively "A receptacle for the water used in baptizing, a baptismal font" (MED, "font," n. 1a.). That the mother uses this specific term, rather than refer, for instance, to a vat of water, demonstrates that she specifically believes that baptismal water is so ineffective that, even in large quantities, it cannot wash away blood, let alone effect a true conversion.

simply murdering Constance? Certainly, the fact that he kills Hermengyld while she is asleep in bed with Constance suggests that killing Constance, the object of his anger, would have been just as easy for him. Perhaps, one might contend, the knight wants his retribution against Constance to be more social than simple murder. As she faces charges for Hermengyld's murder, she will be subjected to the same shame and embarrassment that the knight faced when she rejected him (or so at least he hopes). Whether this is his motivation or not, the pattern that begins to emerge is, of course, one about her narrative, in multiple ways. For one, there seems to be something about Constance, as she is shaped by her many narrators, especially Genius and the Man of Law, that makes her narratively invulnerable – that is to say, no matter what other characters may intend, her body, as preserved by her closed narrative, cannot be breached. At the same time, it is specifically in/through her narrative that her foes attempt to do her the most harm: the Sultan's mother by profaning the Christian narrative of conversion and Communion with the bloodbath, and now the rebuffed knight, by fabricating a false narrative of Constance as a murderer.

Fortunately for Constance, when her framer attempts to prove her guilt in Hermyngyld's death in front of the king, she is saved, proving that in many ways, she is figuratively invulnerable as well as literally so. Somewhat surprisingly, it is Constance's blood that saves her in this instance – although, of course, this salvation comes not as a result of her blood being shed, but of its being royal. The jealous knight, as predicted from the scene he has so carefully left in Hermengyld and Constance's bed, calls on the blood on the knife he has planted next to her to proclaim her guilt. In Gower, the knight goes so far as to give the knife – and in particular the blood on it – agency and voice as a witness against Constance: "'Lo, seth the knif al blody hiere! / What nedeth more in this matiere / To axe?'"

(ll. 861-863). As far as the knight is concerned, this blood is all that is needed to condemn Constance. The knight's accusation here is not entirely dissimilar from the medieval concept of cruentation, which was the idea that the corpse of a murder victim would begin to bleed spontaneously in the presence of the murderer. Both cruentation, used throughout the Middle Ages as an actual form of trial by ordeal to determine criminal guilt, and the knight's assertion that this bloody knife should carry the same legal weight against Constance, point to a belief in blood having an agency and voice not entirely unlike those of a person.

While the knight's charge, and his attempt to have the blood on the knife used to kill Hermengyld carry legal weight against Constance, do not succeed, this scene does show another blood as having a real, powerful effect on everyone present. After the knight makes his accusation against Constance referring to Hermengyld's blood, Chaucer's Man of Law calls on a different blood to save her: "O blood roial, that stondest in this drede, / Fer been thy freendes at thy grete nede!" (II.657-658). While the Man of Law's exclamation seems at first glance to be simply an expression of overwhelming pity at Constance's fate, decrying that someone so noble should have to endure such a lonely, dishonorable ordeal, it is precisely at the moment that he recalls his audience's attention to Constance's blood, specifically the royalty of it, that her fortune changes. Immediately after this apostrophe to Constance's royal blood, Constance is saved, as the knight is smitten by the hand of an angry God after lying under oath. Although Gower's account of the scene does not include the Man of Law's interjection about Constance's blood, the two versions are nearly identical in their description both of what the divine hand does to the knight ("And bothe his eyen broste out of his face," "That he hath bothe hise yhen lore" [Chaucer, II.671; Gower, l.876]), as well as in the primary charge laid against the knight by the heavenly voice that follows the hand. In

Chaucer, the voice proclaims, "'Thou hast desclaundred, giltelees, / The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence,'" while in Gower it says, "'O dampned man to helle, / Lo, thus hath God the sclaundre wroke / That thou agein Constance hast spoke'" (Chaucer, II. 674-675; Gower, ll. 880-882). The shared use of the word "desclaundred"/"sclaundre" emphasizes that, as far as God is concerned, the knight's primary crime has not been his murder of Hermengyld, but his dishonest imputation of Constance's guilt. Given this emphasis, the Man of Law's exclamation about the royalty of Constance's blood not quite twenty lines before the divine hand and voice enter the scene underscores the fact that it is the knight's attempt to do harm to Constance – specifically, to slander her royal blood – that is both expressly forbidden and punished. Not only is the knight prevented from doing Constance any literal, physical harm (i.e., when he might either rape her or stab her, rather than Hermengyld, in bed), but he is also prevented from doing her reputation – her "blood roial" – any harm. Fortunately for Constance in this instance, other narrators of her story – God in this instance – have more power than the angry knight, and her narrative remains one of closure and invulnerability.

The "blood roial" that saves Constance in this episode of the tale is also profoundly effective on the people around her, especially Alla/Allee. Although Constance's capacity to effect conversion fails in Syria, here in Northumberland it succeeds, and ultimately achieves one of the few somewhat vulnerable experiences Constance has in the tale. Whereas the Sultan and his men at the beginning of the tale are moved to convert by the narrative of Constance they hear from others, it is the firsthand witnessing of the outcome of Constance's

trial that similarly moves Chaucer's Alla.[62] Before the divine intervention has taken place – in fact, immediately after the Man of Law has exclaimed in pity for Constance's blood – Alla is profoundly moved by Constance's plight: "This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun, / As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee, / That from his eyen ran the water doun" (II.659-661). The placement of this moment of Alla's compassion directly after the reference to Constance's blood underscores that it is precisely her blood that so moves him to pity – and it is, notably, a pity that moves him to tears. Although Constance's "blood roial" remains safely contained within her body as her invulnerability protects her from injury, its effect on Alla is strong enough to make him vulnerable and porous, as tears flow from his eyes. In addition to making him cry, Constance's blood inspires Alla, as well as much of his kingdom, to a completed conversion (as opposed to the gruesomely interrupted conversion in Syria), and moves the king to marry her. Whereas Constance's ability to interculturally integrate herself into the Sultan's life, religion, and country is unsuccessful, she is far more successful here in Northumberland.

Her interpersonal success here encompasses the fact that, not only do many people convert, but Constance is also, for the first time in the tale, conspicuously open to others in a bodily sense, albeit briefly, when she becomes pregnant with Alla/Allee's child. The Man of Law bemoans the fact that wives like Constance must, for their husbands, "leye a lite hir hoolynesse aside" in the marriage bed, and Genius avoids any reference to Constance and Allee having conjugal relations with the suggestion that "The hihe makere of nature / Hire

[62] This is actually one of the moments of difference between the two versions that I find most compelling, as Gower has Allee, like the Sultan, learn about Constance's trial secondhand, rather than witnessing it/presiding over it himself. Were this an analysis more focused on differences between the two texts rather than primarily reading them as parts of one larger literary conversation, this would be a moment where I would linger on what this difference means for the relationship between Custance and Alla as opposed to the relationship between Constance and Allee. As it is not, I will not linger, but will instead direct any interested readers to, among others, the scholars listed in fn. 3.

hath visited in a throwe" (Chaucer, II.713; Gower, ll. 916-917).[63] The very resistance and reluctance on the part of both narrators to describe the scene or even acknowledge that Constance is sexually active with and vulnerable to Alla/Allee emphasize the profound extent to which both versions of the tale are obsessed with Constance's invulnerability. Genius' attempt to circumvent the issue, by suggesting that God has impregnated Constance, not only elides the possibility of her taking part in a vulnerable, intimate relationship with another person, but also implies a quasi-incestuous moment, as Constance is impregnated by her own creator. It is not entirely surprising, then, that it is with the child conceived in this marriage that Constance's next moment of intersubjectivity takes place – a moment in which her vulnerability is necessary for her son's survival, but that vulnerability is notably difficult for her to achieve.

Cast to sea in a rudderless boat for the second time, Constance now finds herself not alone, but with her newborn son, Maurice/Moris. Unlike her first exile, from Syria, this banishment stems not from an inability on Constance's part to integrate herself into her new community – indeed, the people of Northumberland love her dearly, and when the falsified letter supposedly from Alla/Allee arrives condemning her away, "Wepen bothe yonge and olde in al that place" (Chaucer, II.820). Instead, this second exile is a direct result simply of Constance's clash with her second mother-in-law, Donegild/Domilde. As discussed above in the analysis of the Sultan's mother, part of the source of Donegild/Domilde's rancor towards Constance lies in her desire for complete control over her son, both politically and, more subtly, sexually. Additionally, Constance's refusal to reveal her identity – particularly her

[63] Allen's summary of the Man of Law as demonstrating that Constance's "sexual relations with her husband are portrayed as inevitably unwanted and violent" underscores both the narrator's reluctance for Constance to become unchaste and the inherent vulnerability of the consummation scene, although I do not necessarily agree that this indicates any real violence on Alla's part (636).

nobility – prejudices Donegild/Domilde against her, as she cannot be sure if her son's new bride is worthy of him. Constance's failure to identify herself can, I think, best be read as her strongest attempt to maintain control over her own narrative.[64] By refusing to acknowledge her identity as the Emperor's daughter, an acknowledgment that would certainly aid others in fitting her into their own versions of her narrative, she attempts to keep at least that part of her story her own. Unfortunately, while this secrecy is forgivable to the people of Northumberland, it is unforgivable to Donegild/Domilde, to whom this is a dangerous act of invulnerability. By refusing to let Donegild/Domilde know what her blood looks like, metaphorically, Constance simultaneously denies the possibility of an intersubjective moment with her mother-in-law and invites her mother-in-law's suspicion that there is something inherently threatening about her blood. As McCracken explores, there is a strong connection, in medieval literature, between fascination with and anxieties about blood and accusations of monstrous birth (61-76). It is, in other words, the very concealment of the narrative of Constance's blood that simultaneously allows and provokes Donegild/Domilde to literally re-write the narrative twice through the stolen letters, accusing Constance of a monstrous birth.

Maurice/Moris, of course, is not actually a monstrous child, but a very real human one, in need of sustenance as he and his mother float across the sea. More vocal in this scene than in any other throughout the tale, Constance prays to both God and Mary for the safety of herself and her child. In the "Man of Law's Tale," the prayer is primarily addressed to Mary, as she asks that the Virgin "'Rewe on my child, that of thy gentillesse, / Rewest on every

[64] This failure, though somewhat perplexing, has been explained several ways by different scholars. Perhaps most compelling is Schlauch's explanation, which is that Constance's reluctance to identify herself as her father's daughter "is probably due to superseded versions in which she is fleeing from her father because he wanted to marry her" (75). The specter of incest, we see, haunts almost every moment of the tale.

reweful in distresse'" (II. 853-854). Likewise in the *Confessio Amantis*, the prayer begs "'O hihe magesté'" to "'Tak of thi wofull woman rowthe / And of this child that I schal kepe'" (ll. 1058-1061). The excessive repetition of the idea of ruth, or mercy, either as an action, as in Chaucer, or as a thing given, as in Gower, connects the two texts. While in Chaucer's text, Constance directs her prayer primarily to "Mooder" Mary, her prayer in Gower ultimately leads to an emphasis on her own maternity (II.840). Having prayed to God for strength in surviving this plight, Constance receives that strength, and it is expressed through nursing her son: "Thus was sche strengthed for to stonde; / And tho sche tok hire child in honde / And gaf it sowke" (Gower, ll. 1077-1079). For once, Constance's body is truly open and vulnerable, and she achieves a moment of genuine intersubjectivity with her son as she nurses him and rocks him to sleep. Bullón-Fernández contends that the language of Constance's prayer, including "besinesse" and "office" "suggest that her mothering role is an injunction by society, a duty she has to perform, rather than her own individual choice" (Gower, ll. 1074, 1075; Bullón-Fernández, 81). While I appreciate Bullón-Fernández' point regarding Constance's diction, what I read in this moment is not about society at all, but about Constance, for the first time, having the opportunity to choose how her narrative – and her blood, as breast milk – will flow. "For if I sterve thou schalt deie," she tells Moris, and this moment of narrative recognition of the necessity of her physical intersubjectivity with her son is crucial (Gower, l. 1071). When it comes to her infant, Constance finally has the agency to tell her own tale, and vulnerably open her body to him. Where others have either failed to breach her bodily boundaries or reinforced them through their narration of her throughout the tale,Constance is the only one who can actually draw her blood (in the form of breast milk) from her body, and this can only be done via nurturing her child.

This openness of Constance's body, however, is not long-lasting, and it is certainly an opening made available only to her son. As their journey continues, one more episode serves to emphasize the unassailable intactness of Constance's body: her attempted rape by a thief on the rocky shore of the "hethen castel" she lands upon (Chaucer, II.904). Rather than succumbing to the thief's assault, Constance is aided both by her own strength and divine justice, and the thief falls overboard, drowning in the sea. Although Constance is given some agency in the thwarting of the attempted rape, both Chaucer and Gower emphasize the divine aid she receives, pointing to the way in which she remains, throughout the tale, thoroughly narratively invulnerable. As the Man of Law recounts the episode, "For with hir struglyng wel and mightily / The theef fil over bord al sodeynly" – a narration of events that begins with Constance's action and agency, but concludes with the thief's fall from the boat as an action of his own ("The theef fil"), rather than one compelled by Constance (II.921-922). In Genius' account, Constance has even less agency in the entire action: "Sche preide God, and He hire herde, / And sodeinliche he was out throwe / And dreynt" (ll. 1120-1122). This moment is preceded by Constance quite cleverly telling the thief that, if he is to spend his lust on her, she prefers that "he ferst loke out ate porte, / That no man were nyh the stede," thereby positioning him conveniently for easy removal from the boat (ll. 1114-1115). However, the actor responsible for the thief's eventual ejection from the boat is clouded by Gower's use of the passive voice – "sodeinliche *he was out throwe*" – thereby emphasizing that some greater power is coming to Constance's aid. Yvette Kisor points out the ways in which this phrasing takes away from the depiction of the scene, particularly in regards to Constance's control over her own fate: "the narration is couched throughout in terms that reduce her agency, asserting Mary and Christ instead as the driving forces of the action" (20,

fn. 29). Allen goes as far as to refer explicitly to Constance's "passivity in the face of her potential rapists" in a list expounding on Constance's "failure of accountability" (642). I am less interested in casting judgment for Constance's passivity here (and I am certainly loath to criticize the victim of an attempted rape for her response to the attack), and I am also reluctant to call it passivity. Instead, I am interested more in the way in which this couching of the encounter, in both Chaucer and Gower, simultaneously renders Constance invulnerable and narratively deprives her of autonomy. It is certainly possible to read Christ and/or Mary as the agent directly responsible for the rapist's drowning – but this reading, I want to emphasize, is only possible *because of the way Genius and the Man of Law have told the story*. The Man of Law's assertion that the man fell after a struggle, and Genius' use of the passive voice, suggests that, rather than passively allowing herself to be divinely saved, Constance may very well have been more active than they are willing to report in their version of her narrative.

Constance's narrative, of course, concludes with her final reunion with her father – not the one that occurs almost concurrently with her reunion with Alla/Allee, but the one that occurs at the very end of the tale, after her husband's death. This final rejoining of father and daughter, and the discomfort it produces, has led many scholars, such as Allen, to write of the conclusion of the tale, "our initial assumption that Constance experiences no threat of incest becomes increasingly less comfortable" (646). As I intend to show as I conclude this chapter, the discomfort and the suggestion of incest that permeate the end of the tale are the inevitable conclusion to this obsessively closed, invulnerable, and circular narrative.

Although romance tradition would have the tale end with Constance happily returned to Northumberland with her husband to live out their lives, that reunion with Alla/Allee is

unusually short-lived: not long after they return to rule England together, he dies, and, rather than staying in England to rule in his stead, Constance goes "wher that sche hadde levere," and returns to Rome and her father (Gower, l. 1582). While Chaucer explains this return home as a blissful conclusion to Constance's story, as "Now is she scaped al hire aventure," her return to her father, as many scholars have observed, feels disturbing in its powerful suggestion of incest (II.1151).[65] Most suggestive of incest in the ending of the tale are each versions' depiction of or reference to the Emperor's death. In the "Man of Law's Tale," the reader is told in rapturous tones that "They (Custance and her father) liven alle, and nevere asunder wende; / Til deeth departed hem, this lyf they lede" (II.1157-1158). As nice as this idea sounds at first, we know that it is not right for the heroine of a tale to live happily ever after, as it were, with her father rather than her husband, and Chaucer's phrasing very carefully reminds us of that. As Dinshaw notes, the phrase "Til deeth departed hem," as well as sounding familiar to 21st-century readers, would have also been readily recognizable to a medieval audience as similar to contemporary wedding vows. Indeed, Dinshaw even quotes a marriage vow recorded as having been spoken at Easingwold in 1484: "to hold and to have, at bed and at burd, for farer for lather, for better for wars, in sekenes and in heil, *to dethe us depart*" (102, 236 fn. 41; emphasis original to Dinshaw). Not entirely unlike Chaucer's overt reference to the marriage vow, Gower recounts that "men seide / That he (Constance's father) betwen hire armes deide" (ll. 1589-1590). Although this depiction of the Emperor's death does have an element of tenderness to it, the context of the relationship between Constance and her father up to this point gives this moment of intimacy a slightly

[65] Wetherbee, an outlier among the more common school of criticism about the tale's conclusion, somewhat facilely claims that "Gower's version preserves little or no trace of the theme of incest that seems to have been inherent in earlier versions of the story, but" that there is "an element of quasi-incestuous possessiveness in the Man of Law's attitude towards his heroine" (69). I disagree of course, and find his stipulations, even the second, to be entirely too dismissive of the incestuous themes included by both Chaucer and Gower.

uncomfortable, inappropriate slant. While the moment does not overtly refer to incest, like Chaucer's use of matrimonial ceremonial language, it strongly suggests it. Even the use of the preposition "betwen" to describe Constance's father's position in relation to her and her arms is evocative of an intertwining and a closure, and Bullón-Fernández' assertion that "Constance closes the circle of her relationship with" her father feels both literally and figuratively apt (84). Certainly, one could argue that I and other scholars are reading too much into these small moments, and seeing incest where there is only a strong familial bond between Constance and her father. However, as Dinshaw astutely reminds us, "The suggestions of incest at the close of the tale are subtle, but the presence of incest in its suppression at the beginning[66] renders these suggestions compelling at the end" (101). Given the early framing of both versions of the tale within the framework of an almost obsessive fascination, on both Genius' and the Man of Law's part, with incest, these "suggestions" at the tale's close carry that much more weight.

Not only does Constance's return to Rome and her father after Alla/Allee's death raise the specter of incest, the fate of her son also points to the ways in which her bloodline is contained and circular, rather than appropriately exogamous and linear. Yes, she has given birth – and suck – to Maurice/Moris, a product of inter-cultural reproduction, but she is unable to fully leave herself open to foreign environments, returning instead to her native Rome and family of origin after her husband's death. Likewise, her son, as Bullón-Fernández reminds us, both is and isn't the offspring of exogamy: after all, he inherits his grandfather's

[66] Dinshaw is speaking specifically of the Man of Law's anti-incest rhetoric in his Prologue, but this is equally applicable to Gower and Genius' obsession with using narratives of incest to impart morals to Amans.

throne in Rome, rather than his father's in England (137).[67] In an effort to preserve her father's bloodline (which, as we have witnessed, is repeatedly preserved in her throughout her adventures), she gives her father an heir, "perform[ing] the role of wife for her father," and, oddly, leaving England without a patrilineal successor to the throne (Bullón-Fernández, 137).[68] Constance's behavior here, in making her son an heir to her father rather than to his own father, seems to accord with the way in which Lynda Boose, in her work on fathers and daughters, describes the mother's role: "that which in the West is modeled by the Virgin Mary – to be the vessel through which the father reproduces himself" (25). I take it as not at all unexpected that Constance should fulfill the stereotypical role of the mother, particularly when the mother referenced is the Virgin Mary, who is quite conspicuously God's daughter as well as mother and spouse. As Bullón-Fernández notes, Constance rather explicitly fits this role: "Constance's third familial, and Marian, role vis-à-vis her father: Constance also becomes her father's mother" (92). This overly intricate and complex system of roles that Constance has to fulfill for her father – daughter, wife, and mother, especially in his moment of death – once more points to the claustrophobic, excessively closed nature of the end of the tale.

That this relationship feels overly enclosed and restricted speaks both to Constance's invulnerability, as someone who apparently cannot be opened, and to the theme of incest. As

[67] Nelson's description of Constance's body as "at once a powerful channel of conversion and a vulnerable vessel" speaks quite strongly to the idea of Constance's serving the role of a mere conduit, for both Christianity and her father's line (220). I disagree, however, as I hope to have shown, with Nelson's assertion that Constance's "physical vulnerability is a source of narrative tension throughout the *Tale*" (ibid.). Indeed, I think it is her very invulnerability that leads readers to a very different tension than Nelson describes.

[68] The very fact that this oddity of inheritance, and the abandonment of the throne of England without an heir, goes uncommented on in both Chaucer and Gower highlights the ways in which the tale is primarily concerned with Constance's own, claustrophobically contained, bloodline. It is certainly not uncommon in romances for a hero to end his or her journey ruling a different kingdom than the one in which they began – see the example of Sir Gowther in Chapter Three, for example – but to leave the original kingdom without any appointed heir or ruler, and to have that lack go unremarked, is uniquely noteworthy.

Allen reminds us of the exogamous imperative of the incest taboo, father-daughter incest is the most taboo, as, in those instances, "the daughter is essentially kept in her chamber," enclosing her (632). As Schlauch analyzes in her important work on the different analogues of the tale, the hint of incest that remains in Gower and Chaucer seems to point to an early anxiety over procreation tied to the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal succession, and I concur that this reveals the narrative's interest in preserving the intactness of her (father's) bloodline at the expense of the typical presentation of exogamy. Bullón-Fernández contends that the incest present in Gower's version of the tale reflects a deep concern on his part throughout the *Confessio* regarding father-daughter incest, a point referenced earlier in Chapter Three's discussion of "The Tale of Canace and Machaire." She insightfully observes, in a claim I agree with wholeheartedly, that the condemnation of father-daughter incest that Gower displays here and elsewhere "cast[s] a very dubious light over the 'Tale of Constance' and its fantasy of self-reproducing, in other words, incestuous, royal power" (143). Constance's preservation of herself and her blood in order to further her father's bloodline is, despite what the romance seems to suggest in places, detrimental to her overall interpersonal and intersubjective success.[69]

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I would like to draw the reader's attention to a comparison between Chaucer and Gower's texts and *Emaré,* a Middle English Breton lay that offers an interesting analogue to the tale. *Emaré,* the only surviving manuscript of which dates to roughly a quarter to half a century after the composition of the *Confessio Amantis* and

[69] Boose writes that a daughter "is the temporary sojourner within her family, destined to seek legitimation and name outside its boundaries" (p. 21). As lonesome as this description sounds, even it is insufficient to describe Constance's solitude. Most assuredly a sojourner, Constance is unable to find the legitimation she craves outside the boundaries of her family and must return to it, unfulfilled, before her journey ends.

Canterbury Tales, tells a version of the story much closer to the folktale Schlauch analyzes, often known as "La Manekine," or "Donkey Skin." In this version of the tale, which Schlauch contends is closer to the original story than Gower and Chaucer's texts, the heroine Emaré's journey begins not with a marriage to the Sultan of Syria, but with an overtly incestuous proposition from her father, who has irrationally succumbed to lust for his daughter following his wife's death. When, after obtaining permission from the Pope for this aberrant act, Emaré's father proposes to her, she unequivocally denies him: "'Nay syr, God of heven hyt forbade, / That ever do so we shulde!'" (ll. 251-252). Thus, her first rudderless sea voyage is commanded by her rejected father, rather than a spiteful mother-in-law. While many of the rest of her adventures are the same, they are less in number: since she never travels to Syria, she experiences no bloodbath there; Emaré is also able to escape Constance's travails with the jealous knight and the would-be rapist. Most notable, however, is the conclusion to the tale. As in the "Man of Law's Tale" and "The Tale of Constance," the story reaches its climax with the heroine's near-simultaneous reunion with both her father and husband in Rome. And as in Chaucer and Gower, the readers are told that Emaré's son, here named Segramour, succeeds his maternal grandfather to the throne of emperor (ll. 1024-1025). Entirely absent from this version of the tale, however, is any mention of Emaré returning to live with her father after her husband's death. Therefore, aside from the fact of Emaré's son becoming her father's heir, the ending of this tale bears no traces of the incestuous undertones of the other two texts.

Two explanations for this difference, both closely related to the themes of narrative and narrative agency, are compelling. The first has to do with the narrative imposed on Constance/Emaré by her narrators. As I have explored above, both the Man of Law and

Genius are extremely concerned with the idea of incest, and, in the case of the Man of Law, explicitly anxious to avoid discussing it. Thus, the explicit incest at the beginning of the original folktale, when the heroine's father endeavors to marry his daughter, is narratively suppressed. It is not much of a surprise, then, that this incestuous impulse, given the opportunity to be overtly explored (and then quickly rejected – Emaré's father deeply and immediately regrets his actions as soon as her boat leaves the shore) in other versions of the text, bubbles up into the unsettling subtle expressions we've seen at the conclusion of Gower and Chaucer's texts. The Man of Law and Genius' attempts to remove incest from the narrative have simply made it express itself in a way that is much more insidious, since Constance and her father never overcome it the way Emaré and her father do. Narrative control and suppression, therefore, serves only to prevent any resolution to incest through vulnerable apologies, as in *Emaré*, and to lead to an unsettling, circularly closed conclusion.

In addition to the incest at the beginning of the tale becoming suppressed and therefore haunting the tale's conclusion, I also see the heroine's voice as responsible for the differences in endings to the versions of the story. As mentioned above, Emaré, though subject to many of the offenses Constance faces, has a degree of narrative control over her life that Constance does not. When Constance is sent to marry the Sultan, she either quietly bemoans her fate, as in Chaucer, or says nothing at all, as in Gower. In *Emaré*, however, the heroine is very verbal about her choices regarding her story: whatever her father says, she will not marry him. And while his decision to therefore cast her adrift in a rudderless boat is certainly cruel, it does acknowledge the narrative choice she has made not to marry him. Unlike Emaré, Constance has virtually no narrative voice. Again and again, other characters, including Genius and the Man of Law, shape her narrative, choosing for her to maintain

closure and invulnerability, preserving her blood and bloodline at the cost of a chance for her to form exogamous intersubjective bonds. Constance's story, in both Chaucer and Gower, is so overpowered by the quest for a perfectly contained narrative, that it is sad, but little surprise, that it ends with her literally and figuratively intertwined with her father, right back where she began.

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